THE ENDS OF EMPIRE:

INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTER AND MODERNIST REALISM

by

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Abstract

"The Ends of Empire" examines a critically neglected relationship between the concept of the institution and the construction of character in the modern Anglophone novel. Contrary to histories of modernism that see it as a literature of interior states, this dissertation argues that key novelists refocused their art on the rapidly expanding totality of the late British Empire's institutions, which they render as both anonymous collective actors in themselves and as contexts for the actions of individuals. Faced with the exhaustion of the bildungsroman conventions that framed narratives of social inclusion in the nineteenth century, along with an expansion of the contexts for individual development from the nation to the global empire, authors began to define character not only as the unique identity or interesting consciousness, but also as a collection of institutionally shared habits, values, attitudes, and gestures. The dissonant political and aesthetic positions of these writers thus converge on a set of formal developments that I term "institutional character," in texts that seek to embody the real but incorporeal authority of universities, corporations, law courts, unions, government bureaucracies, the press, the peerage, and the military. In chapters on Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Mulk Raj Anand, and Elizabeth Bowen, I present a narrative of modernist literary history that traces how modern writers sustained, through the representation of institutions, the realist ambition to capture social totality. This history seeks to complement, and to some extent to correct, recent literary-critical work that focuses on state power, a concept that is not always sufficient to the aesthetic effects of social organization in novels of late empire, in which public and private institutions emerge as actors in a worldwide system.

First Reader: Douglas Mao; Second Reader: Frances Ferguson

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Introduction: The Ends of Empire

This dissertation examines the relationship between the concept of the institution and the construction of character in the modern British and Anglophone novel between about 1900 and 1950. Accounts of the novel in this period have found it difficult to move entirely beyond a historical scheme that emphasizes modernism's turn inward and its break from nineteenth-century concerns with realism and the social, even as the new modernist studies has illuminated how the features typically associated with that turn—the exploration of consciousness and perception, the intensification of linguistic play—were themselves deeply embedded in and inflected by the cultural and political life of the time. Meanwhile, as scholarship in the burgeoning field of world literature studies has offered new models of the institutions *of* literature—the transnational systems through which texts are produced, circulate, and acquire value—less has been said about the place of institutions *in* literary texts. In the following chapters, however, in discussions of Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Mulk Raj Anand, and Elizabeth Bowen, I argue that it was precisely by bringing institutions into narrative that these writers sustained the totalizing ambitions of realism. Against the exhaustion of the conventions that framed narratives of social inclusion in the nineteenth century, and as the perceived contexts for individual development expanded from the nation and state to the globally administered empire, modern writers broadened what might count as character in attempts to embody the real but incorporeal authority of the institutions that spanned that empire: the corporation, police, church, university, law court, labor union, public health department, press, peerage, military, intelligence service, and others.

One of this dissertation's central claims, then, is that novelists of the late British Empire began to conceive of the literary character not only in terms of the moral individual, the unique identity, or the interesting consciousness, but also in terms of institutionally-shared assemblages of habits, gestures, values, and attitudes. In the early twentieth century, as Franco Moretti writes, "The growth of institutions was a massive historical fact . . . which a realistic narrative could hardly ignore," and the figures I examine in this study did not ignore it; each, I argue, spent perhaps the richest phase of his or her career engaged in the problem of representing institutions and institutional life.[1] In this engagement they develop and modify widely variant attitudes toward the social and political phenomena they depict, even as their works share important commonalities in how they conceive of what institutions are and how they might be narrated. Thus these novelists' dissonant political and aesthetic positions converge, first, on an understanding of the institution as both a collective actor in itself and a set of practices that provide the context for the actions of individuals; and second, on a set of formal features comprising what I term "institutional character." By this phrase I designate the process by which novelistic characters are not only influenced or interpellated by the effects of institutions, but are in a sense built from the ground up out of institutionally-shared traits. Through the apparent contradiction of being individuated by their possession of shared but institution-specific qualities, such characters introduce the action of institutions themselves into narrative, though at the cost that character itself comes to seem abstract, impersonal, or empty as the imagined individual recedes toward institutional type. In the seemingly flat characters and distended plots these novels

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[1] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2000), 230.

produce, they trouble notions of the individual as narrative center, while demoting what Georg Lukács terms the novel's "essentially biographical" structure—seen most clearly in the bildungsroman's interest in childhood and young adulthood—to track the extended timescape of the institution's collective life.[2]

The economist Douglas Allen has demonstrated that the industrial revolution in Europe was also an "institutional revolution," in which improvements in the measurement of time and distance drove a transition from "pre-modern" institutions, characterized by patronage or "venality," to what we now recognize as "modern" institutional forms. The staffing of the civil service, for example, went in a relatively short period of time from appointment on the basis of "status" and "trust" accrued through "political power, social status, and wealth" to appointment "based on exam performance, professional standards, and input monitoring."[3] By about 1850, Allen argues, this shift had generated institutional forms that remain with us today. Individuals interacted with government, businesses, the legal system, and the military in ways that twenty-first century observers would recognize.

The institutional revolution did not go unnoticed by those who experienced it. In British intellectual life, the problem of modern institutions was commonly figured in terms of an opposition between an order evolved organically out of a national tradition and one imposed in the interests of collective alteration and improvement. As early as 1829, Thomas Carlyle's "Signs of the Times" diagnosed the spirit of the age as "mechanism," in which "all is by rule and calculated contrivance. . . . nothing follows its spontaneous course, nothing is left to be accomplished by the old natural methods,"

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[2] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 77.
[3] Douglas Allen, *The Institutional Revolution* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012), 14-17, 71.

"politics" is replaced by "mere political arrangements," and "[men] hope and struggle. . . . for external combinations and arrangements, for institutions, constitutions."[4] To this Carlyle opposes "dynamism," "the primary, unmodified forces and energies of man." "Science and Art," Carlyle writes, "rose up, as it were, by spontaneous growth. . . . They were not planted or grafted, not even greatly multiplied or improved by the culturing or manuring of institutions. . . . it is the noble people that makes the noble Government; rather than conversely. On the whole, Institutions are much, but they are not all."[5] In his essay "The Literary Influence of Academies" (1864) and in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Matthew Arnold reasons along similar lines, linking institutions to the national spirit: a nation characterized by "energy and honesty," like the English, "will not be very apt to set up, in intellectual matters, a fixed standard, an authority, like an academy. . . . Nations have their own modes of acting, and these modes are not easily changed."[6] An academy, Arnold suggests, is a fitting institution for the French, whose "open and clear mind" and "quick and flexible intelligence" incline them to the requisite deference to authoritative reason, but "the very faults . . . which have hindered our having an Academy and have worked injuriously in our literature, would also hinder us from making our Academy, if we established it, one which would really correct them."[7]

In this central line of nineteenth-century British thought, the right kind of institution complements natural characteristics, whether of the group, as in the analyses of Carlyle and Arnold, or of the individual, as in the Victorian novel. Jane Eyre, on

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[4] Thomas Carlyle, "Signs of the Times," in *The Collected Works of Thomas Carlyle*, 16 vol. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1858), 3:100, 106.
[5] Carlyle, 3:107-08.
[6] Matthew Arnold, "The Literary Influence of Academies," in *Essays Literary & Critical*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London: J. M. Dent, 1906), 31-32, 50.
[7] Arnold, "The Literary Influence of Academies," 30-31; *Culture and Anarchy* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1869), xi.

arrival at Lowood Institution, immediately engrosses herself in "pondering the signification of 'Institution,'" but she is at pains to tell us that her first interaction there "was contrary to my nature and habits": "I hardly know where I found the hardihood thus to open a conversation with a stranger."[8] Jane moves from charity home to aristocratic house to village school and nearly into missionary service, and while she responds to and is clearly shaped by the challenges she faces in each of these archetypal Victorian institutions, hers is ultimately a story of innate disposition asserting itself in episode after episode. "My first quarter at Lowood," she says at the beginning of the novel, "comprised an irksome struggle with difficulties in habituating myself to new rules and unwonted tasks" (71), while near its end, as she studies to be the missionary wife of St. John Rivers, Jane finds "that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation" (460). *Jane Eyre*'s explicit focus on its title character's "natural vocation" constitutes Jane as separate from the institutions through which she passes, and the action of the plot hinges on her relationships with other individuals. As Nancy Armstrong puts it, Jane is individuated by virtue of possessing "an interiority in excess of the social position that individual is supposed to occupy."[9] And as the virtuous manufacturer John Thornton says in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North & South*, putting the issue in political terms, "No mere institutions, however wise . . . can attach class to class as they should be attached, unless they bring the individuals of the different classes into

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[8] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Stevie Davies (New York: Penguin, 2006), 59.
[9] Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2005), 8.

actual personal contact. Such intercourse is the very breath of life."[10] This might be called the methodological individualism of the Victorians: an account of the social order begins with "actual personal contact" between individuals of "natural vocation," and activity at the collective level amounts to the sum of these contacts.

Institutions in this scheme may be much, but they are not all, and where they are not, individual character is. To think otherwise is to make a kind of category mistake that often plays out as comic oddity, as in Charles Dickens's innumerable grotesque peripheral characters. Such figures' characterological deformity and minoritization are not only, as Alex Woloch has compellingly argued, a product of their constricted role in an economy of narrative labor; not infrequently, these qualities result from characters' seemingly excessive attachment to the protocols of some institution or other. As *Great Expectations*' law clerk Wemmick says, "It's not personal; it's professional, only professional."[11] When Wemmick's "post-office"-shaped mouth reappears a century later, on a character in Elizabeth Bowen's World War II novel *The Heat of the Day*, it follows the arc travelled by character in the twentieth century: no longer grotesque, identity generated by institutional attachment has become the norm, and moved closer to the center of the novel. Writ even larger, this link across time suggests an alternate means of periodizing the Anglophone novel from the nineteenth to the twentieth century: when Wemmick's mouth (and the institutional form of character for which it stands) reappears,

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[10] Elizabeth Gaskell, *North & South* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1855), 353.
[11] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Edgar Rosenberg (New York: Norton, 1999), 155.

it implies that, as Joe Cleary argues, "nineteenth-century realism already contained latent modernisms that broke strongly to the fore only in conditions of systemic crisis."[12]

Novelists like Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë sought to narrate the possibility of balance or rapprochement between institutions and individuals. Likewise Carlyle, at least early in his career, envisions a mechanism that would become "our pliant, all-ministering servant," while Arnold foresees "academies with a limited, special, scientific scope" complementing the English national spirit.[13] Institutions figure predominantly as a means of reinforcing and perpetuating certain aspects of individual or collective character whose wellsprings lie elsewhere. But the desire for synthesis was overtaken by the expansion of the British Empire and state facilitations of the market in the late Victorian period, and with regard to these historic shifts the line of thinking I identify here contains important gaps. As Paul Johnson argues in his *Making the Market: Victorian Origins of Corporate Capitalism*, from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries "the market" was typically figured as "an absence of institutional structures. . . . a natural and neutral trading-ground."[14] Yet in a series of Acts passed in the 1840s and 1850s, Parliament established the most elaborate form of what would become arguably the most important non-statal institution of modernity: the joint-stock company. "In fact," Johnson writes, "the market of Victorian England was a deliberate, and thus far from natural, construction of ideas, conventions, beliefs, customs, law and enforcement mechanisms" (24). These

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[12] Joe Cleary, "Realism after Modernism and the Literary World-System," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73 (2012): 268.
[13] Carlyle, 117; Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 50.
[14] Paul Johnson, *Making the Market: Victorian Origins of Corporate Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 24.

developments stand at odds with an intellectual milieu in which ideals of inherent character and natural institutions retained a certain hegemonic sway.

Historians, political scientists, and economists have documented how the life of the great European empires, especially the British, from the 1880s onward was characterized by the increasing prominence of formal institutions, whether state-, market-, or civil society-based. Ronald Hyam describes the expansion of state and financial power throughout the Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the birth of a "new Leviathan": the "masterful modern State" untethered from the popular spirit or geographic contiguity of the organic nation. "At its most basic level," he writes, "[the new Leviathan] represented a shift from society to state, from local linkages of regulatory social integration to networks of rationalizing bureaucracy and intrusive policing, ever-widening and ever-tightening in their grip. This Leviathan was more interventionist in economic life than Western states were in their own home bases."[15] Historians have amply documented the upheavals in local societies initiated by this process of violent modernization, while a vast critical literature has theorized the effects of the process whereby the non-West was incorporated into Western systems of knowledge and control, demonstrating how fundamental this process was to notions of identity for both colonizers and colonized. The new Leviathan, Hyam argues, ultimately "provided the framework within which Afro-Asian nationalist protest was effectively articulated, and within which alternative 'post-colonial' states could be constructed" (61). While the imperial state's specific methods and emphases varied widely—the directly administered empire-within-an-empire of India, the chartered company and "indirect

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[15] Ronald Hyam, "The British Empire in the Edwardian Era," *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, *vol. 5: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Robin W. Winks (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 59.

rule" in Africa, financial hegemony in South America—each form of imperial activity in this period consistently formalized administrative, economic, and educational systems in particular ways in attempts to alter collective behavior. As Hyam points out, this shift was often first enacted and most intensely felt on the periphery of the Empire rather than in the metropolitan center, but the extent to which it had permeated European culture by the early twentieth century can be seen in the work of a writer like Arnold White, whose jingoistic *Efficiency and Empire* (1901) criticizes the state of the Empire in frankly racist and eugenicist terms and goes on to propose a series of procedural reforms to the treasury, consular service, foreign office, war office, military, and education system—rather than, say, a reinvigorated ethos of heroic self-sacrifice—as a means of amelioration.[16]

In Europe itself, Eric Hobsbawm argues, institutions that mobilized tradition in the service of new forms of social organization began to "spring up . . . with particular assiduity . . . in the thirty or forty years before the first world war":

> Quite new, or old but dramatically transformed, social groups, environments, and social contexts called for new devices to ensure or express social cohesion and identity and to structure social relations. At the same time a changing society made the traditional forms of ruling by states and social or political hierarchies more difficult or even impracticable. This required new methods of ruling or establishing bonds of loyalty.[17]

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[16] See Arnold White, *Efficiency and Empire* (London: 1901).
[17] Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 263.

Hobsbawm groups together such processes as "the standardization of administration and law" (264) and the growth of political parties alongside the development of the public school, the establishment of "old boys' networks," and "the institutionalization of sport" (299). Though Hobsbawm's scope is confined to Europe, other scholars have demonstrated how these processes of institutionalization both aided and were enabled by the construction of an imperial economy and system of inter-state relations. P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins have shown that the transformation of the informal networks of British patronage and glad-handing into a standardized regime of finance and services "was complemented by a social adaptation which replaced custom and privilege by meritocratic selection as the means of entry to the ancient universities, the civil service, the armed forces, the Church and the major professions."[18] At the same time that access to these institutions was formalized, they point out, "the City of London extended its institutional frame across the globe to act as banker and carrier to the world's commerce and trade."[19] But while the agents of Cain and Hopkins's "gentlemanly capitalism" were members of the English finance and service aristocracy, the roles they played and the structures of rule that they inhabited were indebted less to the specificities of national origin and more to the relationship between City financial institutions and the imperial state, which combined to both link together geographically disparate possessions in a common framework, reconfiguring the conduct of political relationships between imperial powers. Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson argue that European colonialism and Atlantic trade from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth

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[18] P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II: New Imperialism, 1850-1945," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. XL, I (1987): 2.
[19] Cain and Hopkins, 11.

centuries fueled the development of various political and economic institutions, especially in Britain, that enabled growth and laid the groundwork for the era of high imperialism.[20] More recently, in his book *Rational Empires*, Leo J. Blanken pursues this institutional analysis through the nineteenth century, combining game theory, economics, and history to argue that European imperial activity in its various forms was provoked and guided by institutional incentives within states, in competing imperial powers, and in areas targeted for imperial exploitation.[21]

This attention to institutions helps to highlight how changing circumstances *within* the British Empire correlated with changes in how relationships were structured *between* empires in the nineteenth century through the era of high imperialism. If the taxation, regularization of land law, establishment of public health departments and police, and other policy choices pointed to by Hyam are products of the internal mobilization of institutions, an event like the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 stands as a salient example of a shift in institutional norms at the inter-imperial level. Attended by all the major European powers and the United States, the conference sought, in essence, to regularize the accelerating scramble for Africa, not so much by establishing which actors could lay claim to which particular areas as by attempting to shift a potentially disastrous ad hoc rush for territory and resources into a mutually agreed-upon framework, minimizing the potential for costly military conflicts. In thirty-eight Articles, the resultant General Act of the Berlin Conference on West Africa seeks "to regulate the conditions

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[20] See Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson, "The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change, and Economic Growth," *American Economic Review* 95 (2005): 546-579, "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development," *American Economic Review* 91 (2001): 1369-1401; and Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail* (New York: Crown Business, 2012).
[21] See Leo J. Blanken, *Rational Empires: Institutional Incentives and Imperial Expansion* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012).

most favorable to the development of trade and civilization in certain regions of Africa"; rather than coming to an agreement that would end the competition in progress, the Act establishes a set of constraints and procedures that will allow it to proceed more smoothly.[22] "The fact that by the mid-1880s the race to dismember Africa was obviously in train," writes Willie Thompson, "led among the powers to the search for rules by which it might be regulated, ones designed to minimize so far as possible the dangers of an unforeseen explosion resulting from actions on the part of their agents over which the home governments had no immediate control."[23] This would enable Britain over the next few years to revive the chartered company, an alliance between finance capital and the state thought to have gone extinct in an earlier period of colonial practice with the East India Company but which would end up doing much of the work for all players in Africa. As John E. Flint documents, "It was impossible to think that such relics of a mercantilist age could be resurrected to serve the imperial needs of a free-trading industrial Britain," and yet changed circumstances enabled their return, much as, at the domestic level, Hobsbawm's "traditions" became new technologies of rule. There has been extensive debate, dating back to the period itself, over how best to characterize the resurrection of the chartered company in Africa: is it an instance of private interest commandeering the authority of European states? Or a case of states leveraging non-statal actors to generate revenue while minimizing their own exposure?[24]

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[22] General Act of the Berlin Conference on West Africa, *American Journal of International Law* 3.1 (1909): 7.
[23] Willie Thompson, *Global Expansion: Britain and its Empire 1870-1914* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 41.
[24] Blanken offers a recent gloss on this longstanding debate. A broadly Marxist approach, based on Lenin's adaptation in his *Imperialism: The Highest State of Capitalism* of the work of liberal economist J. A. Hobson, takes the former position; more recent mainstream political science and international relations work (including that of Blanken himself) takes the latter, arguing that the Marxist position cannot account for why, for example, states were able to shut down chartered companies when they had served their

The answer to these questions is less significant for my discussion here than is the changing global institutional environment to which those questions point; to pose them presupposes relationships among global institutions, whether statal or non-statal, which no longer sustain any obvious connection to the "natural vocations" of individuals who occupy those institutions. At this distance from the individual, institutions appear to have become ends in themselves, relating only to other globalized institutions. As Joseph Conrad writes, "We have all heard that well-known view that trade follows the flag. And that is not always true. There is also this truth that the flag, in normal conditions, represents commerce to the eye and understanding of the average man."[25] In responding to this altered understanding of international relations, Conrad points not to the conflict between states and private interest but to the specter of their becoming indistinguishable: rather than trade following the flag, or vice-versa, the two seem to collapse into a single condition in which, at least to the "average man," one represents the other.[26]

In dwelling on the institutional line through this perhaps familiar imperial history, I have sought to trace the distance it travels from the conditions that seemed to underlie

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purpose. The putative incommensurability of these two accounts, however, seems to me to rest on a reductive account of Marxist thought, and what is most central for my argument here is how the debate itself is symptomatic of how institutions like the chartered company blurred the distinction between state and non-state institutions. See Blanken, 77-79; and Cain and Hopkins, 18.

[25] Conrad, "Confidence" [1919], in *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 30.

[26] The novelty of this state of affairs is asserted by the historian and Liberal MP Ramsay Muir, who writes of the British Empire that "this amazing political structure, which refuses to fall within any of the categories of political science, which is an empire and not yet an empire, a state and yet not a state, a supernation incorporating in itself an incredible variety of peoples and races, is not a structure which has been designed by the ingenuity of man." Muir, *The Expansion of Europe: The Culmination of Modern History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), 232. Muir is cited by Daniel Deudney in his account of turn-of-the-century geopolitics, which focuses on Halford Mackinder, John Seeley, and H. G. Wells: their "efforts . . . to chart the British predicament and design an appropriate strategy were part of a transnational effort to grasp the origins and implications of the emerging global-scope system." Deudney, "Greater Britain or Greater Synthesis? Seeley, Mackinder, and Wells in the global industrial era," *Review of International Studies* 27 (2001): 190-91.

mid-Victorian thinking about the individual and the institution. The spread of institutional thinking to the scale of the empire in the late nineteenth century was an important part of the conditions to which Conrad and the other novelists I examine in this study responded in the twentieth. "The realist novel of progress," Jed Esty suggests—for which *Jane Eyre* might well stand—"is part of a productive, industrializing, and nationalizing phase of European history succeeded by a consumerist era linked to imperial adventurism and speculative finance."[27] In contrast to those novels of progress, Conrad's political novels, between 1904 and 1912, address the world of high imperialism in narratives of "material interests," depicting state power as sharply attenuated and in conflict with a range of other collective actors. In *The Years*, Virginia Woolf traces how the mores and values of imperial administration, law and finance are handed down through generations, from the Indian Mutiny of 1857 to London in the 1930s, looking tentatively to institutional disaffection and "professions for women" as the conditions for social change. Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* (1936) depicts the destructive effects of global finance in partnership with the colonial state at the same time as it finds in the same institutions opportunities for development and accountability. And Elizabeth Bowen's work during the Second World War, especially her novel *The Heat of the Day*, relies on a model of institutional impersonality that she draws from the "social idea" created by the Anglo-Irish, a class whose very existence was predicated on the peculiarities of British imperial practice. Conrad's and Bowen's narratives rely on sensibilities borrowed from the past to confront the institutional landscape of the twentieth century, and while their implicit political conservatism contributes to their works' thematic insight and formal innovation, it also

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[27] Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 67.

imposes a limit on their institutional vision; the exploration of institutional character forms a distinct phase in both authors' careers, followed by retrenchment and shifts of focus. Woolf and Anand share the aspiration to both confront the violence and exclusions of modern institutions and turn those institutions to account, and their later works often retain the desire to narrate collectivity, though in quite different ways.

Despite these varying emphases, the texts I examine are united both by their innovations in the construction of character and by their active refusal of the bildungsroman conventions that in the Victorian period served to frame the narration of individuals and their relation to social wholes. Moretti's *The Way of the World* made the bildungsroman a locus for a substantial amount of recent critical work on the Anglophone novel (even as Moretti himself, in his comparative study, refers to the Victorian bildungsroman as "the worst novel of the West" [214]). The coming-of-age novel, in Moretti's account, was the nineteenth century's privileged genre, symbolically mediating between individual "self-determination" and "socialization" into the collective: in the bildungsroman, "One's formation as an individual in and for oneself coincides without rifts with one's social integration as a simple *part of a whole*" (16). The era of the European bildungsroman comes to a close with what Moretti terms "the late bildungsroman," a short-lived subgenre that includes James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* Conrad's *Youth*, and Franz Kafka's *Amerika*, among others. As remarkable as these novels are, in Moretti's "tree" of novel history they are "a dead branch" (245); they mark the point at which "a form deals with problems it is unable to solve" (243). Late *Bildungsromane* are not, as they are commonly taken to be, the precursors to the monumental texts of high modernism, but rather represent the last gasp

of the tropes of individual development and social inclusion that were the engines of nineteenth-century realism.

Moretti's work has been hugely influential, not least because the level of generality at which his strongly symptomatic account of the novel is pitched has allowed for a great deal of productive disagreement, and much recent work in modernist and twentieth-century studies has productively contested his thesis that the notion of development fades from the novel after the pyrotechnics of the "late bildungsroman." Douglas Mao has examined the persistent interest of a variety of nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers in "the dream of tuning subjects to their worlds" in works that revolve around childhood and aesthetic environments.[28] Gregory Castle redirects Moretti's argument in suggesting that the notion of Bildung—in the specific sense of aesthetic, spiritual, and cultural development of the subject—is in fact largely absent from the Anglophone novel in the nineteenth century, but is revived by modernism to critique a world not adequate to protagonists' potential development.[29] And Esty traces the subterranean importance of the concept of the nation in Moretti's account, arguing that as the Age of Empire disrupted the self-sufficiency of nationhood, it did the same to narratives of development: "As the national referent was increasingly embedded in the matrix of colonial modernity, the destinies of persons, and the peoples they represent, had to include not only the story of progress, but also stories of stasis, regression, and hyperdevelopment. Modernism's untimely youths—Woolf's Rachel Vinrace, Conrad's Lord Jim, Joyce's Stephen Daedalus—register the unsettling effects of the colonial

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[28] Douglas Mao, *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development, and Literature, 1860-1960* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), 7

[29] See Gregory Castle, *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 2006).

encounter on humanist ideals of national culture."[30]

Yet one aspect of Moretti's concluding argument in *The Way of the World* has received less explicit attention than others. The death of the bildungsroman is linked in an obvious way to the slaughter of the Great War, yet "the war was the final act in a longer process" (229). What precipitated this process, Moretti suggests, is that in place of what I have termed the methodological individualism of the Victorians, "social institutions began to appear as such" (230). The nineteenth-century bildungsroman preserved "neutral spaces," areas of life in which the individual could grow into reconciliation with society on what appeared to be one's own terms: "what he must do is also symbolically right" (230). But the institutions of the twentieth century produce "functional integration," in which even the illusion of individual assent to institutional norms is erased. The totalizing reach of "institutions as such" presented an insoluble problem for the novel of development, and thus a change in the social world produced a change in novelistic form—in this case, the end of a form. Moretti's account thus closes with the declining importance in the novel of both youth and the institutions that housed (and stifled) it. While Castle, Esty, and other readers of the twentieth-century bildungsroman have countered by demonstrating the continued relevance of the youthful protagonist, the literary fate of institutions has been largely neglected. But the texts I examine in the following chapters contravene, in ways that studies of the twentieth-century bildungsroman have not, Moretti's assertion that the idea of collective forms "as

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[30] Esty, 67. A sample of other recent work on the twentieth-century bildungsroman would include Tobias Boes, "Beyond the Bildungsroman: Character Development and Communal Legitimation in the Early Fiction of Joseph Conrad," *Conradiana* 39 (2007): 113-124; Urmila Seshagiri, "Modernist Ashes, Postcolonial Phoenix: Jean Rhys and the Evolution of the English Novel in the Twentieth Century," *Modernism/modernity* 13 (2006): 487-505; and Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.* (New York, Fordham Univ. Press, 2007).

constitutive of individual identity—and not just destructive of it" has "remained an unexplored possibility in Western narrative" (232).

In demonstrating how novels narrate collectivity through institutional character, I aim to complement, and to some extent expand upon, recent scholarship that seeks to elucidate the literary effects of modern collective forms like the state and corporation. Critics including John Marx, Sean McCann, Bruce Robbins, Michael Rubenstein, and Michael Szalay have begun to map the ways in which literary texts actively affirm, productively critique, or formally adapt state power.[31] This critical trend—now, perhaps, bordering on a movement, and first codified by Amanda Claybaugh in her essay "Government is Good"—has proven enormously productive, and my debts to it will be clear in the chapters that follow. But much of the effectiveness of these analyses issues from the fact that they tend to turn aside from "the state," however defined, to establish linkages between that concept and phenomena that might at first appear to have no necessary connection to the state: McCann focuses on the private detective, Robbins on patronage, Rubenstein on infrastructure, and Szalay on the private insurance company. Pairing of the state itself with various accompanying categories, while frequently illuminating, can also suggest the lack of internal differentiation implicit in the term "the state," and thus gestures toward the limits of the state as a category of literary analysis. As my discussion up to this point should illustrate, this is particularly true with reference

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[31] See Amanda Claybaugh, "Government is Good," *minnesota review* 78 (2008): 161-166; John Marx, *Geopolitics and the Anglophone Novel, 1890-2011* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012); Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2000); Bruce Robbins, "The Smell of Infrastructure: Notes toward an Archive," *boundary 2* 34 (2007): 25-33 and *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a Literary History of the Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007); Michael Rubenstein, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Univ. Press, 2010); and Michael Szalay, *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2000).

to the aesthetics of social organization in novels of late empire, which frequently depict state power as attenuated and inextricable from private interest and imperial competition. (It is telling in this regard that Marx's *Geopolitics and the Anglophone Novel*, the only one of these studies to address the late-imperial period, foregrounds "governance" and "administration" rather than the state as such.) By retaining a relatively tight focus on the representation of institutions, and allowing the flexibility of the term itself to incorporate a variety of collective forms, including those of the state, I aim to situate state power alongside the non-state actors that proliferate in the literature of the late British Empire.[32] In doing so, this study aims in part to build on Joe Cleary's suggestion that "modernism might now be viewed not as a liquidation but as an attempted sublation of realism into more spatially and cognitively expansive forms."[33]

In their introduction to a special issue of *Contemporary Literature* devoted to literature and the state, Matthew Hart and Jim Hansen acknowledge the challenges facing statal criticsm as they call for work that undoes "the seeming necessity of the opposition between monolithic state and individual artist." In trying to make sense of the ways that modern novelists narrate institutions, I have been aided by recent work from the so-called "new institutionalism" in the social sciences. As Klaus von Beyme notes in his

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[32] Lisi Schoenbach's *Pragmatic Modernism* (New York, Oxford Univ. Press) considers pragmatist philosophy, institutions, and habit in American modernism, while Caroline Levine discusses institutional time in "Infrastructuralism; or, the Tempo of Institutions" (ACLS Humanities E-Books, 2011). With regard to the institutions *of* literature, Rod Rosenquist, in *Modernism, the Market, and the Institution of the New* (New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), considers high modernism as a series of attempts to consolidate and make permanent a certain ideal of aesthetic novelty. Lawrence Rainey and Mark Morrisson have traced the venues through which modernism was disseminated; see Rainey, *The Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1999), and Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2001). *The Institution of Literature*, ed. Jeffrey J. Williams (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), collects essays that examine the university and the teaching of literature and theory. In the burgeoning field of world literature, see Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004).

[33] Cleary, 261.

contribution to the recent *Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, political science has largely bypassed the shortcomings of monolithic concepts of the state by developing a robust set of theoretical approaches to institutions. No longer so new—James March and Johan Olsen's 1989 study *Rediscovering Institutions* is often mentioned as a point of inception—the new institutionalism encompasses an array of concepts and definitions of institutions, taking them most broadly as "the rules of the game" (property rights, free markets) and most narrowly as specific material structures (parliaments, courts). What these approaches share is an understanding of institutions as autonomous. Analysis begins at the level of the institution, rather than viewing institutions as merely expressive of the underlying preferences of powerful individuals, classes, interest groups, or other elements of society. They also tend to emphasize the extended temporal scale on which institutions operate, and the interchangeability of particular individuals with regard to institutional functioning.[34] Institutional thinking from the social sciences thus resonates with my readings of literary texts not as a theory to be rigorously applied but as a set of suggestions for how and where to look for the action of institutions in the formation of novelistic character. Indeed, the novels I examine in this study develop their own shared understanding of what an institution is, focusing neither on abstract laws nor on the minute workings of specific political structures. Indeed, modern novelists lend greater

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[34] See, for example, Allen, *The Institutional Revolution*; Blanken, *Rational Empires*; *Bringing the State Back In*, eds. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984 *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, eds. R. A. W. Rhodes, Sarah A. Binder, and Bert A.Rockman (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006); *The New Institutionalism in Sociology*, eds. Mary C. Brinton and Victor Nee (New York: Russell Sage, 1998); *New Institutionalism: Theory and Analysis,* ed. Andre Lecours (Univ. of Toronto, 2005); Hugh Heclo, *On Thinking Institutionally* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2008); *Institutions and Social Order*, ed. Karol Soltan, Eric M. Uslaner, and Virginia Haufler (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1998); James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions* (New York: Free Press, 1989); Douglas North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991); and Jack Knight, *Institutions and Social Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992).

definition to the models offered by the social sciences, finding a middle ground in conceiving of institutions as material structures (and thus as capable of action in their own right) joined to sets of rules and values (and thus serving as contexts for the actions of individuals). Presenting these institutions as autonomous objects of representation, these texts produce a different account of institutions from broadly Foucauldian or Althusserian approaches that have understood institutions in literature as epiphenomena of more diffuse fields of culture, power, discipline, or ideology.[35]

In this dissertation's first chapter, I examine how, in the first decade of the twentieth century, Joseph Conrad undertook a sustained novelistic examination of what he called simply "political institutions." His little-read collaboration with Ford Madox Ford, *The Inheritors*, like the better-known *Nostromo* and *Under Western Eyes*, encodes a profound pessimism about collective action in an attempt to hold together incommensurable modes of characterization. *The Inheritors* and *Nostromo* tell stories of character's institutionalization in a minor key, in which the moral individual's attenuated capacity for independent action leads to his or her assimilation into the relatively "inhuman" institutions of government, the press, and what Conrad famously calls "material interests." These novels suggest critiques of this process while they rely on it for their formal innovations. Breaking with the bildungsroman conventions upon which Conrad's previous major works, such as *Lord Jim*, had relied, these texts bend the arc of character toward type as individuals emerge in tension with institutionally dictated roles.

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[35] D. A. Miller's classic study *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988) is representative in this regard: as Miller writes by way of introduction, "This work centers not on the police, in the modern institutional shape they acquire in Western liberal culture during the nineteenth century, but on the ramification within the same culture of less visible, less visibly violent modes of 'social control'" (viii).

In *Under Western Eyes*, his final political novel, Conrad attempts to reintroduce moral individualism and to investigate what possibilities remain for "Victorian" values of detachment and critical rationality. The demands of technologized institutions foreclose, in this novel, what Conrad terms the "efforts of detachment" that he himself undertook in writing his own "novels of analysis": the language teacher who narrates *Under Western Eyes* finds that his ability to observe is predicated on an inability to intervene effectively in the events unfolding around him. This failure to yoke the moral individual to political agency, I suggest, thus marks a point of stylistic exhaustion. While the political novels stand on the cusp of modernism and look back to the historical moment of high imperialism, in his later career Conrad leaves questions of institutional character behind, returning his attention in large part to solitary men on the periphery of a fading empire.

Chapter 2 turns to the ambitious literary-political project undertaken by Virginia Woolf in the 1930s. Like *Nostromo*, Woolf's *The Years* uses a temporally distended plot and a large cast of characters to build a narrative centered on institutional rather than individual life. *The Years*, which emerged alongside the feminist polemic *Three Guineas*, embeds a more optimistic view of the modern institution in its experiments with character even as it marks what is lost in an institutionally-structured world. While Jesse Matz has pointed to Woolf's classic essays on fiction as emblematic of the novel's shift from rendering social to "perceptual" totality, I argue that Woolf fully develops in *The Years* a theory of character only hinted at the earlier essays: character is a function of incorporation into the university, the legal system, colonial bureaucracy, and medicine. The rule-bound procedures and habits of institutional life present means through which experience is shared and individuals cohere as part of a social structure, though that

structure remains marked by differences of gender and class. Character emerges in formal tension and thematic feedback with the institutions of which individuals are the bearers. The shared nature of institutionalized traits suggests, for Woolf, a productive limit on radical individuality, and the choices individuals make within these constraints generate possibilities of collective change. Peggy Pargiter, a dissatisfied young doctor, manifests a critical sensibility that looks toward women's growing presence within the institution of medicine; her cousin Sarah, however, embodies the deforming effects of institutional exclusion, as a rich but unstructured aesthetic sensibility leads her to speak in illegible riddles, disintegrating on the page. In *The Years*, Woolf ultimately seeks to elaborate institutions as a means to what she calls "the old fabric insensibly changing without death or violence into the future."

A similar optimism about the character-generating aspects of the institution animates the early novels and political writing of Mulk Raj Anand. In Chapter 3, I argue that Anand's *Coolie* stages a process of discrimination among competing forms of collective life. Anand's narrative that ranges across late-colonial India, as *Coolie*'s protagonist Munoo encounters a cast of representative figures whose digressive subplots span an entire social order. In the process, the novel registers on the one hand the destructive effects of global finance partnered with the colonial state, in modern institutions such as banks, factories, police forces, and labor unions; on the other, it intermittently evokes "native" systems of tradition, especially religion, caste, and the domestic sphere, which at first appear as quasi-Dickensian stays against the violence of imperial capitalism. Yet these traditional forms too are folded into the novel's indictment of late-colonial Indian society, and the text finds in its "British"-coded institutions

weakly utopian opportunities for development, accountability, and meaning-creation. Presenting these qualities as ideals, *Coolie* yokes a thematic critique of the extant institutions of nineteen-thirties India to a formal logic that draws on those institutions, and their potential transformation, to develop its minor characters. *Two Leaves and a Bud* and *Across the Black Waters* go on to address the workings of specific imperial institutions—the tea plantation and army, respectively. Anand's novels of the thirties and early forties thus develop literary approaches to globe-spanning institutions that anticipate the politics of radical institutional reform that Anand would propose for an independent nation-state in his *Letters on India* of 1942. *Coolie* in particular registers more profoundly than has been acknowledged the tensions of its late-colonial setting and historical moment, in which modernizing nationalists like Anand himself sought to give shape to the emerging nation, negotiating among collective forms that refused to remain within or exclusively outside its permeable boundaries.

In her family chronicle *Bowen's Court*, Elizabeth Bowen develops a theory of institutional life, grounded in the history of the Anglo-Irish landowning class, that situates forms of collective persistence in between and alongside the demands of state power. The unique hybridity of the Anglo-Irish—pulled between England and Ireland, between state power and civil society, and between the historical roles of European aristocracy and settler-colonial bourgeoisie—both enables Bowen's stylish and impersonal concept of the institution and makes it available to alternate uses. Against the tendency in critical work on Bowen to see the Anglo-Irish Big House as a vehicle for aristocratic nostalgia, I argue that *Bowen's Court* ultimately works to disarticulate the values of Anglo-Ireland from the house itself, transforming a historical class fraction's

"social idea" into a corrective to mere "personal life." In Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948), institutional impersonality and style are reconstituted in the shadowy complex of institutions that make up the wartime state, informing the literary representation of the present in the technocratic, cosmopolitan setting of World War II London. This Blitz novel depicts a world in which forms of human relationship are mediated to a great extent through wartime institutions – institutions that, because of the atmosphere of secrecy that pervades the novel's plot and setting and infiltrates the very rhythms of its prose, come to seem impossible to describe with any specificity. The wartime state is thus rendered as an archipelago of crypto-institutions that nonetheless creates opportunities for new forms of self-transformation. Bowen's unusual forms of character are products of a desire less to capture the precise workings of institutions in narrative than to explore forms of behavior—beautiful, stylish, honorable, exciting—to which politics is largely incidental and that are enabled by the impersonality of institutional life. However, the hybrid aristocratic formation that generates Bowen's concept of the institution as style and impersonality also generates a limit to that concept, exemplified in Bowen's engagement with the emergent welfare state and in her early Cold War journalism.

Elleke Boehmer suggests that the novel in England, throughout its history, has primarily engaged with the history of empire under the sign of trauma and loss, while "the world-spanning dimensions and dynamism of the British empire have been more vividly registered and embodied" by writers "with some form of colonial, colonized or decolonizing background."[36] The texts I address in this study, spanning the last fifty years of the history of the British Empire and written by a Polish émigré, a metropolitan

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[36] Elleke Boehmer, "Afterword: The English novel and the world," *End of Empire and the English Novel since 1945*, ed. Rachel Gilmour and Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2011), 241.

English modernist, an Indian nationalist, and an Anglo-Irish landowner, are more conflicted. Institutional trauma and hope are often implicated in each other and distributed across both the stories these novels tell and the formal "dynamism" with which they go about telling them—a dynamism motivated in many instances by the need to capture in literary form conditions to which authors were deeply unsympathetic. These tensions are perhaps most apparent in the case of Conrad, the subject of my first chapter.

Chapter 1: "Law, Good Faith, Order, Security": Joseph Conrad's Institutions

I. CONRAD'S INSTITUTIONS AND THE ORGANIC NATION

The narrator of Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* tells of "a certain prominent man. . . . then a person in power" in the Costaguanan capital of Sta Marta, who "had exclaimed with a hollow laugh, once . . . at a time of political crisis":

> "You call these men Government officials? They? Never! They are officials of the mine—officials of the Concession—I tell you. . . . The political *jefe*, the chief of the police, the chief of the customs, the general, all, all are the officials of that Gould."[1]

What his listeners overlook, the prominent man suggests, is that Charles Gould's silver mine has overtaken the Costaguanan state as guarantor of official authority. And indeed, the mine will go on to become, at the novel's climax, "big enough to take in hand the making of a new State" (323). But the prominent man takes for granted that the officials must derive their authority from some extrapersonal source. His apparent confusion lies in how to figure that source: is it "the mine," the land and infrastructure? "The Concession," the legal fiction that forced ownership of the mine on Gould's father? Or is it "that Gould" himself?

Conrad's narrator, however, has already offered a seemingly less ambiguous account of this "power in the land": "The San Tome mine was to become an *institution*, a rallying-point for everything in the province that needed order and stability to live" (119-120, emphasis mine). But "institution" itself is a notoriously mutable term. As Mark

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[1] Conrad, *Nostromo*, ed. Martin Seymour-Smith (New York: Penguin, 1990), 120.

McGurl writes, its "meaning . . . ranges so easily in our usage from social organizations housed in buildings and supplied with proper names . . . to individuals like Henry James or James Joyce, who become 'institutions' of a kind, to a more diffuse sense of institutions as 'established practices,' as in the institution of the family, or literature, or slavery" (132). Seen in this light, the prominent man's seeming confusion about the source of official authority comes to look more like precision: it is exactly as products of an institution that the officials can be "of" the mine (a social organization with a material structure), the Concession (a quirk of the established practices of law), and that Gould (a distinct individual). *Nostromo* has long been read as what Eloise Knapp Hay, in a classic study, calls "a modern political novel: it "laments the loss of individual self-control and the defeat of will power by anonymous social forces."[2] But as the prominent man indicates, one would be hard pressed to find "individual self-control" or autonomous "will power" in the novel's universe to begin with, and the "social forces" are hardly so "anonymous": they are institutions, or as Conrad calls them, "material interests."

In the midst of writing *Nostromo*, Conrad took "two nights and the morning" to write a brief essay on Anatole France.[3] The essay attributes to France's genius the notion that "political institutions, whether contrived by the wisdom of the few or the ignorance of the many, are incapable of securing the happiness of mankind."[4] The consensus that this was essentially Conrad's own view goes back to his friend and collaborator Ford Madox Ford, who confirmed that Conrad had, "as a Papist, a profound disbelief in the

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[2] Eloise Knapp-Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), 177.
[3] Joseph Conrad to Ford Madox Ford, 22 November 1904, in *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, 5 vol. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), 3:183; Conrad to Edward Garnett, 6 July 1904, 150.
[4] Conrad, "Anatole France," *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 30.

perfectibility of human institutions."[5] And the passage on France seems to offer an epigraph for the series of novels and essays upon whose threshold Conrad then stood. The imminent publication of *Nostromo* would be followed by *The Secret Agent* in 1907 and *Under Western Eyes* in 1911, not to mention the major essay "Autocracy and War," on the Russo-Japanese War (1905), and the story collection *A Set of Six* (1908), which dealt extensively with themes of revolution and social upheaval. Yet despite the general acceptance of this decade or so as Conrad's political period, critics have generally found in these works little in the way of a positive concept of politics as such. Their emphasis on individual action, skepticism of rationalist improvement schemes and collective agency, and a divided attitude toward imperial practices, might be termed more ethical than political, affirming little aside from solitary endurance.

Avrom Fleishman, in his classic *Conrad's Politics*, was the first to situate the author's views in a primarily English tradition of organic nationalist thought reaching back to Burke and Rousseau, through Coleridge, Thomas Carlyle, Thomas and Matthew Arnold, George Eliot, and the Oxford neo-Hegelians T. H. Green and F. H. Bradley, among others.[6] Fleishman argued that Conrad was not, as many of his Cold War-era American interpreters insisted, a prophet of radical individualism. Properly understood, organicism offers a "critique of individualism": the individual's existence takes on meaning only in the context of the organic community. If Conrad seems particularly obsessed with individual seekers, this is because authentic community has become largely impossible to achieve under the conditions of Western modernity. Thus *Lord Jim*,

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[5] Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (London: Duckworth, 1924), 58.
[6] See Fleishman, *Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1967). Fleishman also includes most of the major English novelists of the Victorian period in this genealogy.

for example, becomes a parable of "identification with the higher claims of the community"; for Jim, rejected by the industrial West, "the only refuge outside civilized atomism lies in creating an organic native community."[7] And for Conrad the concrete form of community is the nation: "'National temperament' is Conrad's term for the popular sentiments, manners, and sense of identity which the organicist tradition made the basis of political organization."[8] As Conrad writes in *The Mirror of the Sea*, "we must turn to the national spirit which, superior in its force and continuity to good and evil fortune, can alone give us the feeling of an enduring existence and an invincible power against the fates."[9] For these thinkers and ultimately for Conrad, the life of the individual is lent meaning by her spiritual identification with a national whole that expresses itself in the formation of a state that relates through commerce and diplomacy to other naturally ordered states for the benefit of all. Nations are the units within which individual lives gain meaning, and any extra-national order is premised on the prior existence of a group of nations properly constituted. Thus Conrad is assimilated to an intellectual genealogy in which the horizon of politics is ultimately national.

At the same time, a countervailing critical tendency has shown the category of the national to be a problematic (if also productive) means of understanding Conrad. The Polish aristocracy into which Conrad was born was a once-ruling class, denied sovereignty since 1795 by the imperial ambitions of Russia, Prussia, and Austria, and inclined to conceive of the Polish nation as, in Geoffrey Galt Harpham's words, "a

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[7] Fleishman, 110.
[8] Fleishman, 68 .
[9] Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea*, in *A Personal Record and The Mirror of the Sea*, ed. Mara Kalnins (New York: Penguin, 1998), 299.

theoretical entity, the absent cause of a defiant but literally groundless patriotism."[10] Both sides of Conrad's family included nationalists and revolutionaries who rallied to this noble but impossible cause. Conrad himself, of course, decided at a young age to go to sea, adopted French and then English as his primary languages, and settled in England to write novels populated by an exceedingly cosmopolitan cast of characters and deeply indebted to French realist models—choosing both personal and artistic self-exile from a nation itself thought to exist in spiritual and political exile in its own homeland.[11] Because of this, even Zdislaw Najder, whose authoritative biography and volumes of historical documents have done as much as any work to bring to light Conrad's Polish inheritance, arguing that "his unusual, polycentric background" makes national contextualization futile.[12] F. R. Leavis famously includes Conrad in his Great Tradition only by establishing a Tradition that, its stated Anglocentricity aside, has as little as possible to do with national origin, turning instead to the English *language* as a medium conveying "essential human values."[13] And when Harpham focuses on Conrad's Polishness, Poland itself functions in his reading as a vanishing point on which converge all the seemingly opposed lines of thought to be found in Conrad's work. For Harpham,

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[10] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *One of Us: The Mastery of Joseph Conrad* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.
[11] See, for example, Zdislaw Najder, "Conrad in his Historical Perspective," in his *Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Fidelity* (Cambridge, 1997: Univ. of Cambridge Press), 188-98. Conrad was both vilified as a deserter and hailed for his literary successes by the Polish intelligentsia of his time; see Fleishman, 13-15.
[12] Najder, "Conrad in his Historical Perspective," 192. See Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1983), *Conrad's Polish Background*, trans. Halina Carroll (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), and *Conrad Under Familial Eyes*, trans, Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983).
[13] See F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1964), 1-27 and 173-226; and Francis Mulhern, "English Reading," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1989), 250-63.

the difficulty of pinning Conrad down on almost any issue is symptomatic of Poland's contradictory, non-existent nationhood:

> The real significance of Poland in Conrad's work is that the real significance is elsewhere; or, to put the matter otherwise, where the real significance is elsewhere in Conrad, there Poland is. Poland stands as the type and first formulation of an elsewhereness, a foreignness, that informs and infects such disparate Conradian phenomena as his heroes, his political ideals, his plots, his 'universality,' his settings, even some of his stylistic exotica.[14]

Poland is less a context or object of analysis than a principle of indeterminacy, the figure of an ambivalence about which Conrad is perfectly unambivalent, a quality that marks him yet again as unique. Or again, as Christopher GoGwilt puts it, even as Conrad ceaselessly interrogates concepts of nationhood there is a "significant *lack* of national affiliation informing Conrad's imaginative and creative work."[15]

The confluence of the political Conrad and the national Conrad has generated a criticism highly sensitive to the unsaid and the contradictory in Conrad's work: first, because Conrad's own national context is so apparently illegible, and second, because he seems to have been unable to produce in his work a positive vision of politics.[16] Both terms end up marking productive absences. And yet in the oft-cited essay on Anatole France Conrad assails not politics as such but "political institutions." Indeed, the term

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[14] Harpham, 13.
[15] Christopher GoGwilt, *The Invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1995), 7.
[16] Other critics who have dealt with the issue of politics and the nation in Conrad include Pericles Lewis, "His Sympathies Were in the Right Place: *Heart of Darkness* and the Discourse of National Character," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53.2 (1988): 211-44; and Paul Armstrong, "Conrad's Contradictory Politics: The Ontology of Society in *Nostromo*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 31.1 (1985): 1-21.

"political institution" (or "institution" alone) appears with considerably greater frequency than "politics" in both his fiction and non-fiction of this period. That he seems to have almost reflexively chosen to discuss the political in terms of institutions suggests, on Conrad's own terms, a means of understanding his engagement with collectivity that does not lead down the path to the nation.

Fleishman casts Conrad as the inheritor of an organicist, Victorian tradition that hoped to resolve the tensions between dynamism and mechanism, spirit and authority, tradition and technology. But Conrad's mid-career novels, especially *Nostromo*, exceed the synthesizing impulse of the nineteenth century while equally refusing to adapt the conventions of the coming-of-age novel, either in innovative ways (as the earlier *Lord Jim*) or in the service of nostalgia (as in later works such as *The Shadow-Line*). Via the concept of "material interests," *Nostromo* generates a narrative of institutions as such, where, as the prominent man points out, character is merely a byproduct of the collective forms—state bureaucracy, military, transnational corporation—that are the real actors in the drama of late empire. Unlike his Victorian predecessors, Conrad renders the transition from a traditional to a technological ordering of institutions as "inevitable," even as he consistently portrays this inevitability as lamentable. His narratives generate alternatives and suggest postures of detachment only to reveal their inadequacy. And he shifts the boundaries of institutional structure from the national to the imperial, expanding it to the levels of the sub- and supra-national. These differences are a product of Conrad's particular sensitivity to the ways in which the social life of places outside of Europe was increasingly assimilated to institutional models—often in ways that fed back into the life of the metropole. The sensibilities that inform his writing originate less in English

government and intellectual life, as did those of Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold, than in the administration and exploitation of England's far-flung imperial possessions and in the negotiations between powers that characterized the period of high imperialism.[17] His engagement with the institution and institutional change helps to lend these concepts greater definition; at the same time, the idea of the institution illuminates certain structures in his work and offers a means of periodizing his career while relating it to the historical currents on which it was propelled.

This chapter will argue three related things: one, that as products of a historical moment in which the idea of the institution was of particular concern, Conrad's political novels suggest that institutional life destroys the aspiration to organic social cohesion while severely limiting the potential for individual action that would counter this effect; two, that despite his fundamental opposition to the development of the modern institution, the logic of institutions and institutionalization contributes in a significant way to certain formal effects in Conrad's writing, particularly to his construction of character; and three, that even as Conrad insists on the necessity for literary writing of a liberal ideal of detachment from institutional life, these novels repeatedly stage scenarios in which that detachment is revealed to be an impossibility or a doomed aspiration. While critical attention to Conrad's politics has revealed his writing to be organized around the *absence* of a collective form he admired but despaired of seeing instantiated in the conditions of early-twentieth-century modernity, the organic nation, the figure of the institution, critically neglected but a persistent presence in Conrad's political writing, and which he viewed with deep suspicion, emerges in counterpoint as an organizing and

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[17] Incidentally, according to Ford, "It pleased Conrad to write at a Chippendale bureau . . . which had once belonged to Thomas Carlyle" (35).

active *presence* in the formal innovations of his work—as what Esty, discussing modernism's inheritance from the realist tradition promoted by George Lukács, calls an "aspect of the world-system understood as a global fact susceptible to positive representation."[18] Conrad's illegibility in terms of national context may be seen in part as a byproduct of his investment in the institutionalizing global order of the late nineteenth century, a period that, as a sort of Age of Institutions, underwrites the imaginative universe of his work, especially in the first decade of the twentieth century.

II. *THE INHERITORS*

These institutional concerns receive an early airing in *The Inheritors*, Conrad's wacky but underappreciated 1901 collaboration with Ford Madox Ford. The novel involves a plot by a group calling themselves the Fourth Dimensionists to tie a respectable old-guard government, and in particular its Foreign Minister, Churchill, to an immoral and inept imperial development scheme undertaken in Greenland, of all places, by the Duc de Mersch. The Dimensionists wager that the venture will be exposed as the fraud it is by a newly aggressive and sensationalistic press, bringing down Churchill's government and handing power to Gurnard, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and a Dimensionist collaborator. A beguiling and unnamed Dimensionist woman insinuates herself into the aristocratic family of the narrator, Arthur Granger, by posing as a long-absent "sister," and manipulates him into writing for a prominent newspaper while she uses the family name to gain entry to the corridors of power. With full knowledge of the Dimensionist plot, but in love with the mysterious young woman and unable to withstand

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[18] Esty, "Global Lukács," *NOVEL* 42 (2009): 370.

the various pressures and enticements of his new career, Arthur, given editorial authority for one night, allows the publication of the exposé that ruins his friend Churchill and ushers in the new regime.

The growing power of the popular press is registered first in failed art-novelist Arthur's reluctance to lower himself to write a series of political and celebrity "atmospheres" or profiles, and then in the dignified Churchill's bafflement at being asked to interview for one.[19] As a year passes and he writes "fifty-two atmospheres in all" (75), though, Arthur's newspaper *The Hour* gains prominence such that, when a damning profile of de Mersch's Hyperborean Protectorate and Trans-Greenland Railway, it seems plausible that the paper is of sufficient prominence to create a scandal that opens the door to Gurnard. In the course of the novel, the figure of the journalist goes from that of "some respectable tradesman that one calls in only when one is *in extremis*" (58) to "*the* man who could be believed" (184). This ascent, though, is less a product of personal virtue or ambition on the part of any particular journalist than of the consolidation and elevation of the institution itself. Arthur says that he

> saw the apotheosis of the Press—a Press that makes a State Founder suppliant to a man like myself. . . . I was nothing, nobody; yet here I stood in communion with one of those who change the face of continents. He had need of me, of the power that was behind me. . . . It was nothing to me. I was just a person elected by some suffrage of accidents. Even in my own eyes I was merely a symbol—the sign visible of incomprehensible power. (99-100)

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[19] See Conrad and Ford, *The Inheritors* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1985), 57-58.

Arthur himself is "nothing," "nobody," "merely a symbol"; he stands in for an "incomprehensible power." "Uniformly unsuccessful" (16) in his attempts to achieve fame as an author on his own, Arthur quickly discovers that the way to a reputation is through adherence to the dictates of his new employers: "I had been very docile; had accepted emendations; had lavished praise, had been unctuous and yet had contrived to retain the dignified savour of the editorial 'we'" (34). The novel captures not only the emergence of the press as a social force, but also the processes by which it shapes the individuals of whom it is comprised. Arthur's realization of himself in the "apotheosis of the Press" offers an example of a formal innovation that appears repeatedly in Conrad's mid-career work, and that I term institutional characterization, in which character is produced not by the cultivation of unique sensibility or potential but by the individual's more or less unquestioning, and often unconscious, adherence to the rules and practices of modern institutions. "Oh," Arthur says, "I never play off my own bat" (197).[20]

The Dimensionists themselves are "a race clear-sighted, eminently practical, incredible; with no ideals, prejudices, or remorse; with no feeling for art and no reverence for life; free from any ethical tradition" (9). In what appears a cynical adherence to pure process, they are also "indistinguishable" (12). Gurnard's face has "nothing distinctive in its half-hidden pallid oval; nothing that one could seize upon" (81). Arthur thinks his young Dimensionist "sister" is "American" (3), "Australian," (5) "Semitic," "Sclav," or "Circassian" (7), finally giving up as she continues to insist that she hails from "a mathematical monstrosity," the Fourth Dimension. Having as their origin not another country but another dimension altogether, the Dimensionists are an almost parodic

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[20] See Tobias Boes, "Beyond the Bildungsroman: Character Development and Communal Legitimation in the Early Fiction of Joseph Conrad," *Conradiana* 39.2 (2007): 113-134.

instance of what several critics have recently pointed to, via Michel Foucault, as Conrad's "heterotopic" sensibility, a product of his globalized and non-national writing that creates spaces "outside of all places" that "have the curious property of being in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relationships they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect."[21] "In relation with" the Dimensionists, and ultimately ruined by them, is the decent government of Churchill, a figure strongly associated with national values and with Englishness specifically, and who according to Arthur "really was a sympathetic character and did stand for political probity" (29). An aristocratic amateur, he is writing a life of Cromwell, loves art in a gentlemanly way, is "sane . . . persistent," a politician by "circumstance," with "contempt for the political mind," and "little personal quaintnesses . . . a deference, a modesty, an open-mindedness" (68). These values are aligned with the English landscape itself when Churchill speaks at a village fair, surrounded by "the sunlight on the stretches of turf . . . the mellow, golden stonework of the long range of buildings . . . the sound of a chime of bells that came wonderfully sweetly over the soft swelling of the close turf" (156). Forced, though he dislikes it, to ally the government with de Mersch's Greenland scheme in the interests of political stability, Churchill's political gamble is, as the young woman puts it, "a desperate effort to get in touch with the spirit of the times that he doesn't like and doesn't understand" (64).

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[21] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," quoted in Mallios, *Our Conrad* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010), 24. See also Robert Hampson, "Conrad's Heterotopic Fiction: Composite Maps, Superimposed Sites, and Impossible Spaces," in *Conrad in the Twenty-First Century*; Cesare Casarino, *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis*, (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2002), 12; and Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007).

At the novel's conclusion, Arthur sits in the newspaper office late at night, deciding whether or not to publish the report that he knows will bring down Churchill's government:

> [N]ow that the condemnation had come, it meant ruin, as it seemed to me, for everybody I had known, worked for, seen, or heard of, during the last year of my life. It was ruin for Fox, for Churchill, for the ministers, and for the men who talk in railway carriages, for shopkeepers and for the government; it was a menace to the institutions which hold us to the past, that are our guarantees for the future. The safety of everything one respected and believed in was involved in the disclosure of an atrocious fraud, and the disclosure was in my hands. (184)

This central passage in the novel's institutional plot is also one of a very few that Ford singled out as having been written by Conrad alone.[22] Arthur becomes a character in embodying a set of distinctive traits drawn from the collectively shared rules, expectations, and incentives of the new journalism. But here he also makes explicit a second logic of institutionality that has been implied throughout, gesturing to another force behind this apparently simple narrative: the opposition between competing concepts of the institution itself. Arthur's description of these institutions as things "which hold us to the past, that are our guarantees for the future" emphasizes the preservation of existing social arrangements, and their inclusion within the sphere of "everything one respected and believed in" imputes an element of moral value to their operation. An institution in

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[22] Ford, 147.

this sense is what McGurl calls "an embodiment of *tradition*, a place where the authority of past practices is contained and conserved," and here it is closely affiliated with the nation—indeed, with the organic nation.[23] Arthur's list of those elements that stand to suffer from the disclosure of de Mersch's scheme builds, like the organicist order, from the individual (Churchill), to the delimited group ("shopkeepers," echoing the line famously attributed to Napoleon, that the English were "a nation of shopkeepers"), to the "government," culminating with an "us" that refers clearly to the English people. Conrad writes approvingly of institutions in this sense in the late essay "The Crime of Partition," where he discusses the "liberties" and "institutions" of the "Polish temperament." "The Polish State," Conrad writes, "in its Parliamentary life as well as its international politics, presented a complete unity of feeling and purpose."[24] A noble people, as Carlyle writes, make a noble government. These might be called *institutions* that have not been *instituted*; they arise naturally and are essentially reflective of the temper of the people and nation, changing only as that temper changes, and acting to ensure the continuity of past and future.

The Dimensionists take a different tack, and the terms of the conflict in *The Inheritors* lies in the distance between the two concepts. Forced from their own overpopulated world, the Dimensionists arrive on Earth without "ideals, prejudices, or remorse," but this does not mean that they plan a violent overthrow of the existing human order. Instead, they will be "irresistible because indistinguishable" (12), like humans but without the "scruples that acted like handicapping weights" that prevent us from following the logic of our social forms to its amoral extreme: "There would be no

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[23] McGurl, 151.
[24] Conrad, "The Crime of Partition" (1919), in *Notes on Life and Letters* (London: J. M. Dent, 1921), xx

fighting, no killing; we—our whole social system—would break as a beam snaps, because we were worm-eaten with altruism and ethics" (13). The Duc de Mersch, whose machinations are essential to their scheme, presents himself as "first and foremost a State Founder" (31), and his "System for the Regeneration of the Arctic Regions" as a liberal imperialist utopia:

> They had laid down so many miles of railways, used so many engines of British construction. They had taught the natives to use and to value sewing-machines and European costumes. So many hundred of English younger sons had gone to make their fortunes and, incidentally, to enlighten the Esquimaux—so many hundreds of French, of Germans, Greeks, Russians. All these lived and moved in harmony, employed, happy, free labourers, protected by the most rigid laws. Man-eating, fetich-worship, slavery had been abolished, stamped out. (99)

This is obviously at odds with the Englishness of the cabinet's "Churchill strain"—indeed, de Mersch's "*Systeme Groenlandais*," an inversion of the organicist ideal, is a state without a nation, its legitimacy further dissipated by its taking sanction not from a people but from a supra-national institution: "The great international society for the preservation of Polar freedom watched over all, suggested new laws, modified the old" (99). Its diverse community of "Esquimaux . . . French . . . Germans, Greeks, Russians" is not self-regulating but rather sustained only "by the most rigid laws." And it turns out to be a fraud: the advertised humanitarian aspects of the Greenland "system" are non-existent, and serve only to justify to the world "a corporate exploitation of unhappy

Esquimaux" (32). In this respect *The Inheritors* offers a popular-novelistic version of a work like J. A. Hobson's *Imperialism*, which appeared in the same year and offered a similar indictment of deceptive imperial practices and economic motives. But, as in Conrad's better-known engagements with empire and colonialism (that is to say, most of his other major writings), "critique" is really not the point. The hypocrisy of the Greenland scheme matters only insofar as it exploits public morality to kick Churchill out (in this sense, the nation would in fact benefit from being less sympathetic about the fate of "Esquimaux"). Greenland is but one of the "corporate" arrangements, which also include the new print media, the activist imperial administration, City financial firms, and even the tatters of hereditary aristocracy (the Duc's "elective" title, for example, has been bestowed on him as a political maneuver), that the Dimensionists seek to occupy and manipulate, often playing them against each other, in a version of what might be termed, in a phrase often attributed to Antonio Gramsci, "the long march through institutions."[25] For them, the institution acts as what McGurl terms "a social *technology*, a way of mobilizing human and other resources."[26] This demands both the remobilization of older forms (Arthur's, and the Dimensionists', reliance on his pedigree for access, for example) and the creation of new ones (the founding of *The Hour* as an institution of the new journalism). Either way, institutions are seen as creating opportunities for collective change, not as providing a guarantee that things will stay the same. "They had no joy, these people who were to supersede us," Arthur says; "their clear-sightedness did nothing more for them than just that [*sic*] enabling them to spread desolation among us and take

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[25] The phrase seems not to actually be Gramsci's, though it is "ubiquitously attributed to him." Joseph Buttigieg, "The Contemporary Discourse on Civil Society: A Gramscian Critique," *boundary 2* 32 (2005): 50n21.
[26] McGurl, 151.

our places" (205). The nature of those "places," and the means of delimiting them, is changing as the social value of the concept of the institution shifts from traditionalism to technology. The novel's "critique" of imperialism, such as it is, is subsumed into the representation of this larger, and on the novel's terms "inevitable," process.

III. *NOSTROMO*'S INSTITUTIONAL AGENCY

The world partly brought into being by events like the Berlin Conference and the growth of the "new Leviathan," in which state power and private interests blur together in the competition among global institutions, is also the world of Conrad's novels. *The Inheritors* is a particularly unconventional engagement with that world whose very eccentricity helps throw particular aspects of it into high relief. But imperial institutions appear throughout his work; for example, in a well-known passage in *Heart of Darkness*: Marlow finds "a large shining map" that shows the division of Africa among the European governments in the office of the quasi-private Company that administers the Congo River trade, and whose employ he is about to enter. *Heart of Darkness* incorporates the late-imperial institutional world in a referential manner—for example, the map clearly situates the narrative in the years following the actual Berlin Conference; Kurtz's International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs is an ersatz version of King Leopold's *Association Internationale Africaine*; and the novel famously draws on Conrad's own Congo experience in its portrayal of these institutions. But Conrad's more thoroughgoing engagements with the late-imperial institution are primarily conceptual—concerned less with reference to specific people and places than with the concepts of the institution and institutionalization that became available in his historical

moment.[27] This conceptual engagement with the age of institutions separates the major novels *Nostromo, The Secret Agent*, and *Under Western Eyes* from the rest of Conrad's *oeuvre*. *Nostromo* in particular may be seen as a pivot point not only in Conrad's career but also in the engagement of the novel form with institutional life, precisely at the moment when, in the classic account, the representational concerns of Victorian realism began to dissolve into the stream of modernism. In this novel, the temporal compression and distension of plot, the evacuation of individual motivation, and the dominance of material interests as actors in themselves can be seen as propelled by an attempt to capture processes of institutionalization in the era of high imperialism. *Nostromo*'s disfigured chronology thus figures Conrad's skepticism about the institutional codification and regularization of the imperial world-system, even as the story itself is driven by a series of episodes in this process. Conrad ultimately needs to import an older set of conventions, those of the romance, to bring a stop to the otherwise potentially endless narrative of institutions.

Unlike *Lord Jim* and Conrad's other *Bildung*-narratives, *Nostromo* lacks a genuine protagonist or any real concern with individual experience. For Fredric Jameson, however, the move from the individual to the social is in fact a "dialectical intensification" of a shared problem: that of the meaning of acts that are "at once irrevocable and impossible."[28] In Jameson's reading, Jim's leap off the *Patna* prompts an existential examination of individual responsibility that stands in for broader questions about modernity, value and ideology; in *Nostromo*, Decoud and Nostromo's escape with

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[27] I owe this distinction to Daniel Stout; see his "Nothing Personal: The Decapitation of Character in *A Tale of Two Cities*," *NOVEL* 41 (2007): 32.
[28] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 269, 264.

the boat full of silver, through which "capitalism arrives in Sulaco" gets "appropriated by collective history . . . as the founding of institutions" (278). These institutions, which herald a new historical epoch, make unrecognizable the acts of heroic individualism that founded them, and thus the novel becomes a meditation on the impossibility of developing a narrative form that would adequately capture the "always-already-begun" (279) nature of its own story. In what Jameson calls an "unplanned harmony," though, this "always-already-begun"-ness is the dynamic not only of *Nostromo*'s story but also of its "historical content"—that is, capitalism itself, which thus turns out to be written into the novel's form at the very moment that that form seems to abandon it. While not exactly disagreeing with Jameson's larger points about Conrad, I argue that *Nostromo*'s address to institutions means that it deals with substantially different problems from those of *Lord Jim*. While in the "negative Marxist hermeneutic" of Jameson's *Political Unconscious* capitalism itself may only ever be manifested in literary texts negatively, symptomatically, or through a "wondrous transfer" (280), *Nostromo*, in certain features of its plot and methods of characterization, actually does develop its institutions as, in Esty's phrase, "susceptible to positive representation."

Some clear differences from *Lord Jim* enable this representational feat. Michael Valdez Moses cites a key passage from the earlier novel:

> But do you notice how, three hundred miles beyond the end of telegraph cables and mail-boat lines, the haggard utilitarian lies of our civilisation wither and die, to be replaced by pure exercises of imagination, that have the futility, often the charm, and sometimes

> the deep hidden truthfulness, of works of art? Romance had singled Jim out for its own.[29]

Moses writes that in placing himself outside of civilization, Jim "hopes . . . to find once again an arena in which personal courage and political action become historically meaningful."[30] This reading immediately throws into relief the extent to which Conrad emphasizes *Nostromo*'s placement very much within the reach of "telegraph cables and mail-boat lines." The novel's second chapter opens by invoking "the wooden jetty which the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company (the O.S.N. of familiar speech) had thrown over the shallow part of the bay"—its inclusion in "familiar speech" reinforcing the extent to which the company is an established presence, its ships appearing "year after year . . . disregarding everything but the tyranny of time" (that is, the regulations of their shipping schedule) (43). By the time of the novel's central events, Charles Gould's development of the silver mine in the mountains above Sulaco has brought with it a telegraph line that extends down the coast and as far North as San Francisco—though it does not yet connect the province to the distant Costaguanan capital of Sta Marta.[31] The telegraph thus links Sulaco directly to Holroyd, the mine's American financier, while failing to integrate the province into the national whole of Costaguana—foreshadowing in infrastructure Sulaco's pending secession from Costaguana and its total incorporation into the circuits of global finance. The steamships and telegraph lines, along with the railroad, are the "material" manifestation of the "material interests" that drive *Nostromo*'s narrative. All, despite their avowed neutrality ("We are not a political faction," says the chief railway

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[29] Conrad, *Lord Jim*, ed. Thomas C. Moser (New York: Norton, 1968), 172, cited in Michael Valdez Moses, *The Novel & the Globalization of Culture* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), 76.
[30] Moses, 85.
[31] See *Nostromo*, 176.

engineer [268]), play pivotal roles in the climactic events of the novel: the telegraph office alerts the Sulaco separatists that the rebel Sotillo and his troops are headed for them by sea; the O.S.N. helps to store and hide Sulaco's main bargaining chip, a shipment of silver from the mine; and the railway "consent[s] to let an engine make a dash down the line" bearing Nostromo. He recalls troops that have been sent to the neighboring port of Cayta; their return helps to liberate Sulaco from the occupying forces of the Monterist rebellion in Costaguana, after which the province secedes.

Given their "interestedness," it is not merely as infrastructure that these "material interests" operate; each is also, like Gould's silver mine, "an institution, a rallying point for everything in the province that needed order and stability to live" (119-20).[32] Here, on the developing edge of global capital, Conrad's narrative folds together the institution as technology (made quite literal—the mine, railway, telegraph, and steamship all rest on the importation of previously unavailable forms of infrastructure; previously operated by "lashes on the backs of slaves . . . it had ceased to make a profitable return, no matter how many corpses were thrown into its maw" [75]) and the institution as tradition (the stated aim is continuity, "order and stability"). In pursuit of "order and stability," the mine, railway, telegraph, and steamship company promise to authorize individual action in the interest of institutional continuity, in a place where "governing" has long been like "ploughing the sea" (178). Ultimately, however—and this is where Conrad's real pessimism inheres—action that is both enabled and demanded by the logic of institutional

[32] Recent work has begun to address the role of infrastructure in modernist and post-colonial literatures; see especially Bruce Robbins's "The Smell of Infrastructure: Notes toward an Archive" and Michael Rubenstein's *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial*. Neither addresses Conrad directly, and I would suggest that while a different reading could indeed present *Nostromo* as a major novel of infrastructure, Conrad himself has no interest in what Robbins and Rubenstein argue is the buried Utopian potential of infrastructure. In *Nostromo*, the development of infrastructure relies on a commitment to institutions that leach away individual agency and diminish the prospects for heroic action.

perpetuation ceases to be the property of the individual, and thus renders individual agency relatively insignificant. Acts are performed by individuals, but it would be more accurate to say that agency in the world of *Nostromo* has moved to the "inhuman" (432) institutions outside of which those actions would be meaningless.

Thus the geopolitical move *Nostromo* makes into the purview of a modernizing institutional order seems to demand of Conrad a new approach to the formal construction of novelistic character. Tobias Boes argues that Jim's search for community in the imperial hinterland marks the moment in Conrad's career in which his deployment of the conventions of the bildungsroman arrives at an impasse; that Jim must die to ensure the integrity of the Patusan community that he had helped to create and which had provided a social context for his *Bildung* obviously creates problems for any notion of "character development."[33] Depictions of the internal states of *Nostromo*'s major characters invariably demonstrate these characters' static fixation on particular objects rather than their development over time. Charles Gould's "imagination had been permanently affected by the one great fact of a silver mine"; for Martin Decoud, it is his love of Antonia Avellanos; for Emily Gould, Charles; for Dr. Monygham, his love of Emily Gould; for Giorgio Viola, "liberty and Garibaldi . . . his divinities" (48); for Nostromo, his reputation, and later the silver which he has stolen and on which he tries to "grow rich very slowly" (417). There is little qualitative distinction in this sense between the primary figures in the novel and more peripheral characters such as the rebel second-in-command Pedrito Montero, whose *bovarysme* births in him a desire "to be a sort of Duc de Morny to a sort of Napoleon" (214, 328, 239, 340), or Don Juste Lopez, with his pathetic wish

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[33] Boes, 130.

"to save the form at least of parliamentary institutions" (304), "the precious vestiges of parliamentary institutions" (314). The novel's central figures occupy more space on the page, and the things they are induced to do make up the substance of the narrative, but it cannot exactly be said that they possess greater *depth*. In terms of the consistency and legibility of their motivations, there are few distinctions to be made among any of these characters.

Even as *Nostromo* empties out the space of the interesting individual psychology, however, it refills that space with the habits and shared traits generated by institutional life—most clearly in the career of Charles Gould.[34] We learn nothing of Gould's early education in England and on the Continent except that, left to his own devices, and instructed in his father's despairing letters to stay away from the corruption and failure of Costaguana and the Gould Concession, he undertakes to become a mining engineer. Yet the science of the work is not what interests him; that remains "vague and imperfect in his mind." Rather, "Mines had acquired for him a dramatic interest" (81). Conrad's choice of adjective here is significant: Gould's interest is not only "dramatic" in being especially strong or striking, but also in that he conceives of the development of the mine metaphorically *as a drama*—as a kind of stage on which individual action becomes meaningful. "Only in the conduct of our action can we find a sense of mastery over the

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[34] The wide divergence in critical opinion about how Conrad wants us to evaluate Gould testifies to the intractability of character in *Nostromo*. Martin Seymour-Smith calls him "the most repulsive character in the book" with "the sadistic and murderous impulse of dictators in his breast" (Introduction to *Nostromo*, 15); C. Brook Miller argues that Gould "embodies the ideals of British culture" that Conrad sees as basically insufficient to late imperialism but admirable nonetheless. Miller, "Holroyd's Man: Tradition, Fetishization, and the United States in *Nostromo*," in *Nostromo: Centennial Essays*, ed. Allan H. Simmons and J. H. Stape (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 14. The difficulty stems from a common take on the novel that sees its baffling chronology and apparent absence of psychological insight as concealing a deeper interest in individual character and motivation. As I argue here, one of Conrad's innovations in *Nostromo* involves doing away with character as a property of the individual the better to depict a social world structured almost entirely by institutional possibilities and constraints.

Fates," the narrator says, with reference to Gould's mindset; "For his action, the mine was obviously the only field" (86). The sense that he is an actor, in the theatrical sense, follows Gould throughout the text: petitioning the financier Holroyd for capital, he consciously produces "a vague smile, which his big interlocutor took for a smile of discreet and admiring assent" (95); he wears "a soft, grey sombrero, an article of national *costume* . . . with his English get-up" (100); his "taciturnity" is "assumed with a purpose" (311). That purpose is to make the mine "a serious and moral success" (86):

> "What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That's your ray of hope." (100)

This use of the mine "as a means, not as an end" (93) rests on a conception of Gould as an independent moral agent: "His character safeguarded the enterprise of their lives as much or more than his policy" (145), "It is your character that is the inexhaustible treasure which may save us all yet; your character, Carlos, not your wealth" (309). No figure in the novel is as closely associated with the idea of the specifically *moral* depth of character as Gould.

And yet the undercurrent of theatricality—of his actions' constructed or contingent significance—consistently ironizes Gould's ostensibly worthy goal. This is hinted at repeatedly: when he first decides to pursue the development of the mine, he "for a moment felt as if the silver mine . . . had decoyed him further than he had meant to go; and with the roundabout logic of emotions, he felt that the worthiness of his life was bound up with success" (101). Forced to pledge his support to the militia of the bandit Hernandez, he is "like a man who had ventured on a precipitous path with no room to turn, where the only chance of safety is to press forward. At that moment he understood it thoroughly" (309); he thinks "the mine had corrupted his judgment" (311). But where Gould is exhausted by what he sees as the constraints placed by imperfect means on an essentially moral end he has chosen to pursue, Dr. Monygham's understanding of the situation goes deeper: "The Administrador had acted as if the immense and powerful prosperity of the mine had been founded on methods of probity, on the sense of usefulness. And it was nothing of the kind. *The method followed had been the only one possible*" (315, ital. mine). The mine, Monygham sees, and the other institutions that have become forces in Sulaco, are not in the control of the individuals who operate them, and constitute not an imperfect means to a humanly chosen end but an end in themselves (that is, in the accumulation of financial and political capital that allows their self-perpetuation):

> "There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the

> continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle." (423)

Monygham's desire for a "moral principle" in this context is essentially a wish for the restoration of character to the self-authorizing individual; in this he anticipates the central problematic of *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad's final political novel. But the world of *Nostromo*, like that of the later novel, has no place for this heroic individual. Even the men behind the curtain—Sir John and Holroyd, the British magnate and the American financier—first appear in the novel oddly subordinated to the institutions they embody: they are bodies with titles but without proper names. Sir John is "the head of the chairman of the railway board . . . [which] hovered near [Emilia's] shoulder" (62); Holroyd is "the considerable personage . . . the big-limbed, deliberate man" (94), whose name the reader only learns indirectly by the mention of the "House of Holroyd" (93) and "the great Holroyd building" (97). The moral content of character having been both asserted thematically (by Gould, and those around him) and questioned formally (in the presentation of character as the staging of an institutional script) throughout the novel, character turns out to be a vessel filled by the actions and duties that were demanded of us by institutions and performed as though we had chosen them. What has been developed by "heroic" action are the institutions that were thought to be merely tools but which turn out to have interests and a logic of their own, independent of any single individual. In *Nostromo*, awareness of this fact seems available, at the cost of immense "cynicism," to both Martin Decoud, who, having found a role as a propagandist and journalist, "call[ing] Montero a *gran'bestia* every second day in the *Porvenir*" (170), commits suicide from "solitude and want of faith in himself and others" (412); and to

Monygham, who ironically finds an institutional home of his own, as "the Inspector-General of State Hospitals (whose maintenance is a charge upon the Gould Concession)" (418). In neither case does their knowledge of the order of things enable them to escape that order.

The static, evacuated nature of individual character in *Nostromo* is both reinforced and complicated by a feature of Conrad's narration that might be dismissed as a stylistic tic if not for the frequency and insistence with which it is deployed, and for the fact that it does not feature to anything like the same extent in Conrad's other writings: rather than conveyors of progressively deepening subjectivity or psychological interest, characters in *Nostromo* become occasions for the proliferation of type-phrases. Sometimes these phrases indicate the named individual's relationship to another character or to an institutional context, but equally often they are produced and taken up by the narrator in a relatively haphazard way. With slight variations, and appearing in both narration and dialogue, the type-phrases are often contradictory and tend toward mock-grandiosity or adventure-tale camp. Charles Gould, for example, is variously referred to as "Don Carlos, the administrator of the San Tome silver mine" (62), "a citizen of Costaguana" (93), "an American himself" (99), "a true Englishman" (105), "El Senor Administrador" (121, 160, 170, 244), "the Ingles of Sulaco" (144), "the Costaguana Englishman" (144), "the king of Sulaco" (145, 305), "El Rey de Sulaco" (174), "*Monsieur l'Administrateur"* (182), and "that stony fiend of a man" (341). Martin Decoud is rendered "the son Decoud" (151, 413), "an idle boulevardier" (151), "the young and gifted Costaguanero" (153), "the Costaguana boulevardier" (154), "the adopted child of Western Europe," "the brilliant defender of the country's regeneration, the worthy expounder of the party's political faith

before the world," "Young Decoud" (155), "the Journalist of Sulaco" (156, 157, 187), "the voice of the party" (188), "the dilettante in life" (188), "the exotic dandy of the Parisian boulevard" (209), "the spoiled darling of the family" (413), and "the lover of Antonia" (413). Likewise, a less central figure like Giorgio Viola is "the Garibaldino" (48), "the old companion of Garibaldi" (209), "the old hater of kings and ministers" (437), "the immaculate Republican, the hero without a stain" (461). The total effect of these type-phrases is to reinforce the novel's anti-developmental logic of character; rather than adding layers of complexity, each repetition carries with it the suggestion that it has captured and fixed the essentials of the individual in a given moment. Characters' ostensibly defining qualities are both recapitulated and blurred as the type-phrases proliferate.

As collections of these repeated but varied titles, the major characters in *Nostromo* cannot be called either round or flat, to adopt for a moment E. M. Forster's well-worn but useful vocabulary. No figure in the novel surprises us with his or her actions; the reader knows the outcome of the War of Separation very early on, and the kinds of internal conflict or "depth" that would produce surprising action are absent from the novel. If there is an exception to this rule, it is when Emily Gould, convinced by Decoud that a forthcoming shipment of silver will be necessary for Sulacan secession, neglects to give Charles information that would prevent its delivery—a turning point in the intricately plotted novel. But even the surprise this might produce—she is otherwise absolutely faithful to her husband, and "never forgive[s] herself" (458)—is surprise not at Mrs. Gould's action but at her lack of it, her allowing things to continue as they were. Moreover, this is entirely in keeping with the logic of the mine, which exerts its power by

the consistency of its operation. Silver comes down every three months, subject like the steamships of the O.S.N. only to "the tyranny of time." Because of his obsession with the mine, Charles Gould, meanwhile, is said to feel "the remorse of that subtle conjugal infidelity through which his wife was no longer the sole mistress of his thoughts" (312), but despite this "remorse" he is never shown to be in any doubt as to where his responsibilities lie. However, individuals are not exactly one-dimensional, flat types: in the words of the railroad's enigmatic chief engineer, "a nickname may be the best record of a success" (274). Each of the many type-phrases suggests a part played, a position occupied ("the King," "the Journalist," "the Republican") in the larger economy of roles produced by the antagonistic interests composing the social field of Costaguana, but "the King" is also, in a different moment, "the administrator," or again "a citizen." At the risk of belaboring the spatial metaphor, the character in *Nostromo* is a jagged assembly of overlapping type-phrases, just too varied and uneven to be "flat" but without the contiguity and change over time that would produce "roundness" or "depth."

No individual is more perplexing in this regard than the novel's namesake. Critics have seen Nostromo and Gould as connected since Conrad's own description of them, in the Author's Note to the novel, as "the two racially and socially contrasted men, both captured by the silver of the San Tome mine" (32). As with Gould, a multiplicity of type-phrases circulate around Nostromo; the very name Nostromo is a mistranslation, "a name that is properly no word" (53), but he is also "Gian'Battista" (53), "a phantom-like horseman" (108), "the lordly Capataz de Cargadores, the indispensable man, the tried and trusty Nostromo, the Mediterranean sailor come ashore casually to try his luck in Costaguana" (135), "this Genoese" (181, 378), "The incomparable Nostromo, the

Capataz, the respected and feared Captain Fidanza, the unquestioned patron of secret societies, a republican like old Giorgio, and a revolutionist at heart" (434), "the hopeless slave of the San Tome silver" (440, 445), "the man of careless loves" (444), "master and slave of the San Tome treasure" (456), "Comrade Fidanza" (462), and "a Man of the People" (261). The full version of his proper name—Gian' Battista Fidanza—occurs only once. While Gould is linked either both a set of problematic and ultimately superseded national identities (Costaguanan, American, English) or to the mine whose protocols he embodies, the range of nicknames applied to Nostromo—indeed, the narrative's regular swapping out of one type-phrase for another, such that they all come to seem like proper names—suggests both a broader set of allegiances and a degree of individual freedom, in that this "universal factotum" who has "personal contact . . . with every European in Sulaco" (69) escapes being incorporated into any particular set of institutional demands. But it also suggests a more radically dispersed sense of identity. If, as I've argued above, character in the case of individuals like Gould, Decoud, Holroyd, Monygham or Sir John is a matter of embodying, literally or figuratively, one's institution whether one likes it or not, Nostromo, apparently residing outside or on the margins of any institutionally organized collectivity, seems like mere negation, groundless, without content at all.

Peter Mallios traces a version of this reading of Nostromo through numerous early critics who found the character unrealistic, inappropriate to the novel's broader concerns, or otherwise unconvincing. Mallios argues that Nostromo's blankness is in fact key to the novel's investigation of the strategies by which national projects are imagined into being—what Mallios terms its "meta-national form." According to Mallios, Nostromo is "socially" central—he interacts with every part of society—and "magically" central—he

exudes almost an almost superhuman romantic charm while doing so. These qualities combine to make Nostromo himself a consummately fictional figure; not only do other characters write about him, but he often appears via the tropes of romance (an impression reinforced by the excessively heroic type-phrases that proliferate around him). His fictional, unreal quality makes him a site onto which other characters project their impossible fantasies of national belonging. This is unquestionably correct, insofar as the narrative is engaged with the discourse of the nation. But part of *Nostromo*'s irony is that these doomed fantasies of national belonging, while they fail on their own terms, have another function that they fulfill entirely effectively and with which the novel is equally concerned: they justify the material interests that are indifferent to national projects. Gould's moral concern with the mine is not national in itself, but he relies on his reputation for "a truly patriotic heart" (73) to advance it; Decoud disavows any "patriotic illusions" (179) but authors the push for Sulacan secession that births a banana republic. Near the novel's conclusion, when Monygham speaks of the various factions in the new Occidental Republic that are plotting to re-annex Costaguana, and are looking "for the necessary force" to "the secret societies among immigrants and natives, where Nostromo—I should say Captain Fidanza—is a great man" (423), he makes clear that yet again national imagining is being used to further "the development of material interests," only through different institutions: the Church and the emergent labor unions. This is the irony that colors the words of Scarfe, a callow railway employee who describes the Monterist rebellion, and the resultant War of Separation in Sulaco, as "one of their so-called national things" (164). "So-called" but insubstantial, nationhood is a failed concept

in *Nostromo* to the very extent that material interests, and the institutional forms through which they establish legitimacy, are successful.

Nostromo's own centrality to the novel, then, is performed on two levels. On one, he enables other characters' ideologies of nationhood; on the other, he works to advance the interests for which that ideology is a cover: he is "an active usher-in of the material implements for our progress" (181). The first props up the myth of self-sufficient moral individualism that underlies various national imaginings; for this he must be the superficial yet multifaceted figure of the many type-phrases that circulate through the narration and dialogue. And in this sense he has a psychic, "magical" function in relation to others. But the second level is at cross-purposes to the first, and in his work for material interests Nostromo only seems like an empty character if character is seen as inhering in the psychologically interesting individual rather than in the shared protocols and demands of institutions. In his "social" role, he is at the behest not of individuals but of the material interests that are the actual agents of narrative and that are represented through character. In this sense he is not so much an empty figure as he is stuffed to overflowing. While the journeys he undertakes on his schooner—the sailing ship being the site where Conrad typically *is* concerned with the intricacies of individual psychology and subjecthood—go unnarrated, Nostromo caroms through the novel leading the workers of the O.S.N.; guiding the railway's investors through mountain passes; "disclosing to the then Chief of Police the presence in town of some professional thieves" (277); carrying messages from Church leaders to Hernandez's bandits; "[making] free of the offices of the *Porvenir*"; hiding the mine's silver, which is the focal point of all the forces in contest for power in Sulaco; traveling on military transports. Though critics

have tended to view Nostromo as undergoing a significant change in the course of the novel, his realization that "I am nothing!" (380)—that he is being exploited—does not change his role in the narrative of institutions.[35] He is subsequently convinced by Monygham to undertake the ride to Cayta, bringing back Barrios (who promises to make him "a captain of cavalry" [408]) and his troops, and he becomes the patron of the revolutionary groups that arise in the Occidental Republic.[36] Becoming a man of *ressentiment*, patron of a secret society run by "a somewhat hunchbacked little photographer, with a white face and a magnanimous soul dyed crimson by a bloodthirsty hate of all capitalists" (436), shows an investment in an alternate order from the one that he helped to install during the War of Separation, but not a move beyond the institutional logic of the novel's social world. His deathbed refusal to give away the location of the silver to either Mrs. Gould or the radical photographer is the closest he comes to acting outside that logic, but, as with Mrs. Gould's own earlier decision not to interfere with the scheduled shipment from the mine, this is not a positive act but a refusal to act. It is acquiescence to an order that has made individual action unthinkable without the agency that resides in institutional authority. It is through these varied roles, and not only in his presence as a site of national projection, that he cements the novel's varied institutions to each other and to the impossible ideal of national unity. Both "meta-national" and "meta-institutional," Nostromo holds together the imaginary projects of nationhood and the real functioning-in-sync of material interests.

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[35] See Mallios, *Our Conrad,* 233-262, and "Undiscovering the Country: Conrad, Fitzgerald and Meta-National Form," *Modern Fiction Studies* 47: 356-390.

[36] Joshua Gooch argues that it initiates an "opportunist turn" in Nostromo, who is led to steal the shipment of silver because of the subjectively isolating effects of finance capital. Gooch, "'The Shape of Credit': Imagination, Speculation, and Language in *Nostromo*," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 52 (2010): 290. This seems correct as far as it goes, but does not account for the basic continuities in the novel's plot of material interests.

In a sense, then, it is fitting that the death of the novel's titular figure comes not as a product of its institutional plot, where there is "no rest and no peace," and which promises to promises to continue without him into the unnarratated future of the Occidental Republic. Instead, Nostromo's theft of the silver initiates the romance plot of the final third of the novel, in which his visits to the Great Isabel Island to retrieve ingots of silver from his hoard dovetail with his visits to the lighthouse manned by Old Giorgio and his daughters Linda (whom Nostromo is to marry) and Giselle (with whom he is in love). Nostromo, returning for silver late one night, is mistaken for another jilted lover of Giselle, is shot by Giorgio, and dies. Lukács asserts that the structure of the novel as a form relies on its being tethered to the life of the individual—it "overcomes its 'bad' infinity by recourse to the biographical form"—and thus does the biography of Nostromo come to an end.[37] But as the political scientists James March and Johan Olsen point out, the biography of the institution exceeds that of the individual, both in its longer duration and in being comprised of many persons; because of this, institutions are "relatively invariant in the face of turnover of individuals."[38] The problems this poses for representing institutions in the novel, a form reliant on the individual character to produce narrative momentum and closure, can be felt not only in the distortions of fictional individuals produced by institutional characterization, but in the awkward copresence of the institutional and romance plots. Critics have on occasion puzzled over what some have taken to be a failure of Conrad's craft in the latter portions of the novel, as the romance plot moves to the fore and disrupts the terseness and complex structure

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[37] Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 81.
[38] James March and Johan Olsen, "Elaborating the New Institutionalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, ed. R. A. W. Rhodes, Sarah Binder, and Bert Rockman (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 3.

promised by the earlier sections.[39] But it would be more adequate to the aesthetic problems *Nostromo* confronts to read the romance plot—failure or no—as a byproduct of Conrad's attempt to incorporate "inhuman" institutions into human-centered realist narrative. In providing a traditional form of closure for the narrative, the romance plot and Nostromo's death look back to a prior realist tradition; but in the process they ironically erase the possibility of an heir for Giorgio, "the old companion of Garibaldi," the avatar of a nineteenth-century revolutionary nationalism. Putting both an aesthetic and a political tradition to bed with this gesture, *Nostromo* also anticipates the more open-ended narratives of a modernist realism of institutional life, though at the cost of its own coherence.

Gould, Nostromo, and the rest of the "Occidentals" have won the battle, but they have lost a war they did not know they were fighting: the attempt to wrest a "moral principle" of action out of institutional life, where that attempt has already been foreclosed upon. But in contrast to their struggle, Conrad presents an alternate way of living in institutions in the figure of the engineer-in-chief of the railway. Unnamed, his physical appearance never described, he is "a brave man" (268) with "an army of workers under his orders" (271), tells his stories "of ignorant prejudice and as ignorant cunning very well" (183), and sees perfectly clearly the course of all the machinations undertaken to defend material interests. He seems amoral in his readiness to defend the railway by cutting any deal necessary, yet he is moderately consoled by the thought of higher aims: "Upon my word, doctor, things seem to be worth nothing by what they are in themselves. I begin to believe that the only solid thing about them is the spiritual value which

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[39] See, for example, Albert Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), 202-210.

everyone discovers in his own form of activity—" (275). Most definitively, though, he never appears except in action to advance the railway's interests; man and institutional role are perfectly congruent, each filling the outline of the other. Efficient and anonymous, he is individualized only by his rank in the institutional hierarchy and the physical marks of his age: we see "engineers of the railway, sunburnt and in tweeds, with the frosted head of their chief smiling with slow, humorous indulgence amongst the young eager faces" (180). Not even remarkable in his unremarkableness—he is no Kafkaesque bureaucrat—he simply appears one day to build the railway and then vanishes, at the novel's conclusion, from the independent Occidental Republic in which it is completed, moving with the impersonality and disregard for national boundaries of the institution itself. His aims and his achievements, in contrast to those of every other character, are in perfect accord. He is Conrad's zero degree of institutional character. It is easy to miss the significance and bitter irony of his success in a novel deeply committed to showing the corrosive effects of modern institutions on the potential for genuine human agency; but it is because of his absolute unity with the demands and authority of the railway company that, as Martin Decoud says, the engineer is "the principal European really in Sulaco" (216).

IV. *UNDER WESTERN EYES* AND DETACHMENT'S DIMINISHING RETURNS

Taking institutions as agents and representing them through innovative forms of characters, *Nostromo* ranks as Conrad's most ambitious attempt to render a social world essentially devoid of individual agency even as it echoes and heightens the themes of his other political novels. Alongside their exploration of institutional character, these novels

typically register Conrad's disenchantment with the institutional world they address by continually producing figures capable of perceiving, whether steadily or fleetingly, the futility of their labors. Inevitably, though, this perception fails to produce better templates for individual action. *The Inheritors* features Arthur Granger; in *The Secret Agent* this role is played by the Assistant Commissioner, who has been recalled from worthy "police work . . . in a distant part of the globe" to the cynical intrigue of London politics: "A square peg forced into a round hole, he had felt like a daily outrage that long-established smooth roundness into which a man of less sharply angular shape would have fitted himself."[40] *Nostromo* offers Decoud and Monygham; the cynicism of the first leads him to suicide, while the conscience of the second leads to acquiescence. Conrad's last political novel, *Under Western Eyes*, is structured around the trope of the man who can see but cannot affect what he sees, attempting to reintroduce the moral individual in the figure of the novel's unnamed Teacher of Languages and to investigate what possibilities remain for what Conrad terms "analysis" and "efforts of detachment." That Conrad did not again address these issues at length in his fiction, I want to suggest, marks *Under Western Eyes* as the point at which his attempts to embody "political institutions" exhaust themselves.

At almost the exact midpoint of *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad's unnamed narrator, an English language teacher who has "lived for a long time in Geneva," recounts his first conversation with the novel's protagonist, the Russian expatriate Razumov. Nathalie Haldin, leaving them to attend to her invalid, grief-stricken mother, has departed with the phrase, "Mr. Razumov does not quite understand my difficulty, but you know what it is."

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[40] Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (New York: Penguin, 1963), 126-127.

As the two men walk along, the language teacher imagines that it is his "mission" to make Razumov "understand" the effect he will have on the Haldins as the "comrade" and "intimate" of their dead son and brother.[41] But in the face of Razumov's irritation and brusqueness—"Must understand this! Not expected to understand that! I may have other things to do" (154)—the conversation takes a different turn, and the language teacher introduces a fact that he suspects Razumov does not know: that "the trouble of which I speak was caused by an English newspaper" (156). That is, the news of Victor Haldin's midnight arrest, with its implication that an insider betrayed him, has been brought out of Russia by a journalist. When the language teacher asserts the probable truth of the report, Razumov's asks, "How can you tell truth from lies?" Lest the query be thought rhetorical, or in reference only to the gossip-strewn revolutionary circles of Geneva, he broadens his inquiry: "In Russia, and in general everywhere—in a newspaper, for instance." The language teacher earnestly responds, "Well . . . . The character of the publication, the general verisimilitude of the news, the consideration of the motive, and so on. I don't trust blindly the accuracy of special correspondents," he says, "but why should this one have gone to the trouble of concocting a circumstantial falsehood on a matter of no importance to the world?" Razumov then changes tack to place the truth or falsity of the report to the side: "That's what it is," he grumbled. "What's going on with us is of no importance—a mere sensational story to amuse the readers of the papers—the superior contemptuous Europe" (156).

With regard to the novel's plot, Razumov's question is a sham; he knows perfectly well that the report is right, since he is the one who turned Haldin in. Yet this

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[41] Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 151.

merely reinforces the sense that the conversation is really about something else. Primed by the resonating issue of "understanding," the question of how to read a newspaper instances a much larger question: "How can you tell truth from lies . . . in general?" In return, the language teacher offers a textbook example of the application of critical reason: not to "trust blindly," to use prior knowledge of the source, evaluate the evidence, consider the speaker's motivation, and so forth. Razumov's response, though, suggests that this is ultimately irrelevant in a world where the effect of a statement will be determined not by its veracity according to independent standards of evaluation, but by the pre-existing situation of its audience, in this case "the superior contemptuous Europe." The passage is shot through with irony, but as it elevates the language teacher's exchange with Razumov above the immediate contingencies of the plot and into a pedagogical register, this passage also thematizes, as two distinct approaches to knowledge, the tension between Conrad's institutional characterization and a more traditional form of character that imagines individual discrimination as possible and desirable. The relationship between these two fundamentally different modes of characterization—one that valorizes critical reason and detachment, another that declares them irrelevant—encodes Conrad's pessimism about issues of individual and collective agency.

In an early review of the novel, Edward Garnett noted wryly that "the professor's story does not, as might be expected, suggest an interpretation of which he himself is unconscious: its last page leaves us almost as much in the dark as the first."[42] Subsequent critics have come to remarkably mixed evaluations of the language teacher; readers in the

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[42] Unsigned Review (Edward Garnett), *Nation*, 21 October 1911, cited in Keith Carabine, *The Life and the Art: A Study of Conrad's* Under Western Eyes (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 209.

sixties and seventies tended to foreground his own professed inability to comprehend the Russians who surround him and what was taken to be his unreliability as a narrator, often in conjunction with theories about Conrad's own relationship to language and writing.[43] More recently, critics have taken a more measured view, drawing attention to the language teacher's characteristically post-Enlightenment navigation between rationality and sympathy and his embodiment of certain values of reason and detachment.[44] The latter view is exemplified in his conversation with Razumov, where the language teacher's lesson on how one tells truth from lies condenses the features that distinguish him throughout the novel, and which issue from Conrad's own sense of the novel's project. The language teacher neither "trusts blindly" nor argues irresponsibly; rather, he is engaged constantly in demarcating the limits of his knowledge and making explicit the norms underlying his judgments, offering, implicitly, the possibility that his opinions could be corrected or revised. Even in his lack of comprehension of the Russians by whom he is surrounded, he allows that a different position might allow him to understand more readily: "Had I been myself a conspirator, a Russian political refugee," he says at one point, "I could have perhaps been able to draw some practical conclusion" (262). Daniel Darvay argues that the language teacher, though not to be identified directly with Conrad, is "an exemplary character for whom Russian affairs appear obscure, timeworn, and illusory so that broad-minded Western values, purified of English insular nationalism, are able to be reinvented as distinctly rational, forward-looking, and

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[43] Hay refers to the language teacher as a "nonentity" able to "explain without understanding" in (296); Frank Kermode calls him "the father of lies, a diabolical narrator" in his "Secrets and Narrative Sequence," *Critical Inquiry 7* (1980): 100.

[44] See Gail Fincham, "'To make you see': Narration and Focalization in *Under Western Eyes*," in *Joseph Conrad: Voice, Sequence, History, Genre*, ed. Jakob Lothe, Jeremy Hawthorn, and James Phelan (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2008), 60-80; and Daniel Darvay, "The Politics of Gothic in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 55 (2009): 693-715.

modern."[45] Darvay points to the language teacher's often-categorical statements about the Russian character as evidence of an irrational prejudice and thus a serious limitation to his sensibility; but these statements are in fact the product of his careful observation of the Russians with whom he comes into contact, and are often carefully hedged. In this way they actually serve to reinforce his embodiment of a critical ethos.

Moreover, this emphasis accords with Conrad's own statements about his project in the novel in an Author's Note written in 1919:

> My greatest anxiety was in being able to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality. The obligation of absolute fairness was imposed on me historically and hereditarily, by the peculiar experience of race and family, in addition to my primary conviction that truth alone is the justification of any fiction which makes the least claim to the quality of art or may hope to take its place in the culture of men and women of its time. I had never been called to a greater effort of detachment: detachment from all passions, prejudices and even from personal memories.[46]

Although Edward Said dismisses the Author's Notes as "concerned mainly with justifying what he did as being reasonable," this was not the first time that Conrad had discussed novel writing in terms of "efforts of detachment."[47] In his letters, Conrad distinguishes between writings about "action" and writings of "analysis," stating that "stories of incident . . . are not studies—they touch no problem. They are just stories in

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[45] Darvay, 707.
[46] Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, 315-16
[47] Edward Said, "Conrad: The Presentation of Narrative," *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983), 92.

which I've tried my best to be *simply entertaining*."[48] The "business of the artist," however, is "analysis" (29), and this term occurs repeatedly in his discussions of later novels, particularly *Under Western Eyes,* of which Conrad writes, "analysis—that's the *tone* of the novel" (59). *Chance,* also in process at the time Conrad was writing *Under Western Eyes,* is referred to as "analysis applied to the life at sea" (106). And elsewhere, Conrad writes to an anonymous aspiring writer, "Let me warn you against bringing emotion instead of reason to your inquiry" (66). The language teacher becomes, in the course of *Under Western Eyes*, an "exemplary" instantiation of these values. Conrad repeatedly emphasizes this ethos of detachment: the language teacher takes on depth and is marked as distinctive by virtue of traits that issue from this ethos, and his position as narrator emphasizes this effect. In effect making an imagined individual out of an ethos, Conrad makes co-present in a particularly intense way both "character" in the literary sense (a character, novelistic character) and character as a moral concern (to have a good character, to cultivate one's character).

Against the language teacher are arrayed what he terms "the ruthless workings of political institutions" (293). Institutional characterization in *Under Western Eyes*, as in *The Inheritors* and *Nostromo*, constructs individuals from the shared practices, rule-bound behaviors, and repeated actions of institutional life, but with a fixity and determinism that is absent from the earlier novels. General T— and Councilor Mikulin, the novel's representatives of Russian autocracy and bureaucratic terror, draw their distinguishing features entirely from their institutional roles. The General does not speak any word or express any emotion that is not in keeping with an institutionally dictated

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[48] Conrad, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, 5 vol. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), 3:30.

role. In an echo of the "surprising" choices of Mrs. Gould and Nostromo, when the General "develops . . . an unexpected thought" it is reincorporated into an institutional affirmation: "Fidelity to menaced institutions on which depend the safety of a throne and of a people is no child's play," he says; "My *existence* has been built on fidelity" (43, 45). He is "the embodied power of autocracy" (72). Conrad makes the institution entirely constitutive of the individual character, though at the cost of the character's reduction to type, as the traits that character embodies are, we're given to understand, shared across an institutional context. General T—, lacking a proper name, is reduced to a title; Councilor Mikulin has the entire history of his life related in a paragraph: he is "*one of those* powerful officials," "simply inconspicuous," whose "downfall" comes in "*one of those* state trials" (253; ital. mine). This is the life of the generic Councilor, not the particular Mikulin.

Opposite the representatives of autocracy are the revolutionists, excluded from the exercise of power through state institutions, for whom a desire to "see all the Ministries destroyed" exists alongside "the spark to start an explosion which is meant to change fundamentally the lives of so many millions so that Peter Ivanovich should be the head of a State" (290). Their relationship to Russian institutions is one of mutual reinforcement rather than negation; a meeting on a train between Councilor Mikulin and Peter Ivanovich, in which Mikulin, wishing to be rid of a troublesome double agent, reveals his identity to Peter Ivanovich, thus safeguarding both of their enterprises (323), echoes Chief Inspector Heat's insight into the relationship between police and thieves in *The Secret Agent*:

> [T]he mind and the instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and the instincts of a police officer. Both recognise the same conventions, and have a working knowledge of each other's methods and of the routine of their respective trades. They understand each other, which is advantageous to both, and establishes a sort of amenity in their relations. Products of the same machine, one classed as useful and the other as noxious, they take the machine for granted in different ways, but with a seriousness essentially the same.[49]

In *Under Western Eyes*, this structure produces multiple inauthentic forms of detachment. The revolutionists' program, though critical of Russian autocracy, spend their time making a fetish of "the people," as when Peter Ivanovich asserts, "In Russia we have no classes to combat each other, one holding the power of wealth, and the other mighty with the strength of numbers. We have only an unclean bureaucracy in the face of a people as great and incorruptible as the ocean" (119). Tekla, the *dame de compagnie* of a prominent female revolutionist, is the only figure in the revolutionist circle who has no illusions about their cynicism and futile plotting, but rather than enabling critique, her disaffection simply leads to a bad conscience and lack of agency that is figured in her intense identification with animals, in particular an omnipresent cat. "Detachment" in relation to the institutions of autocracy is deformed into either delusion or abjection.

Razumov himself finally testifies to the ultimate incommensurability, for Conrad, of reasoned detachment and institutional incorporation; his trajectory in the novel is

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[49] Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, 110.

determined by trying and failing to hold them in an uneasy tension. He describes himself as possessed of "patriotic instincts developed by a faculty of independent thinking—of detached thinking" (83); his political manifesto, "History not Theory. Patriotism not Internationalism. Evolution not Revolution. Direction not Destruction. Unity not Disruption," verges on a parody of conservative liberalism; he is frequently described as "English," a term charged by its association with the language teacher. And yet he is simultaneously as pure a product of institutional life as any character in the novel. Parentless, without a relation in the world (the aristocratic Prince K—, who may be his father, notwithstanding), he seems to spring fully formed from the University, but with an education less liberating than bureaucratizing. He hopes to win the Ministry of Education essay prize, the winner of which "would have a claim to an administrative appointment of the better sort" (12). Often marked as "the student Razumov," he is defined by an institutional routine: "He walked to and from the University, ascended stairs, paced the passages, listened to lectures, took notes, crossed courtyards . . ." (247). And he leaves the University only to be assimilated into Mikulin's Ministry, and then abandoned in abjection, visited periodically by the revolutionists among whom he had spied. As Mikulin says when Razumov defends his "attitude of detachment": "For a man like you . . . such a position is impossible" (244).

For Conrad, then, the cost of making moral character adequate to institutionalized modernity—of using it to "make you see," as he famously writes—is the loss of any practical application of its moral aspect and its capacity to undertake "efforts of

detachment."[50] In *Under Western Eyes*, the futility of political action and politically-motivated critique elevates the status of detachment as ethos, rendering it the only means by which a privileged individual may achieve a position from which to perceive and convey truths about the world. Detachment is thus valuable insofar as seeing clearly is the most one can do in a world where one cannot hope to affect what one sees, and what it turns out to be capable of producing is not historical change but a novel like *Under Western Eyes*: the language teacher, unlike Marlow, has written his story, using "(his) pen to create for the reader" (5) the personality of Razumov.

In the end, the novel's pessimism about political action and individual agency is given a sharper point by the pretense that the text itself is the language teacher's written composition. The language teacher's position is not that of Conrad; the teacher is an "exemplary" character drawn from the ethos of detachment. Conrad's own position, as what Hay calls the novel's "missing center," is in a sense more grim.[51] Conrad looks back to nineteenth-century concepts of critical reason and detachment, embodying them in the elderly, untimely teacher of languages, who, insofar as he is able to act, does so only in reaction to the plans of those who have only "scorn for all the practical forms of political liberty known to the western world" (104). Those individuals, in turn, are

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[50] In this way, Conradian detachment in *Under Western Eyes* may be seen as a postscript to the historical trajectory of detachment in Victorian culture offered by Amanda Anderson. For the early and mid-Victorians, Anderson argues, efforts of detachment were undertaken in the service of moral education or of progressive systemic critique, as depicted most notably in the novels of George Eliot. A late Victorian trend, exemplified by Oscar Wilde's aphoristic style, elevates forms of detachment once judged "bad"— "irony, dandyism, and aestheticism"— to privileged status. From founding political action, detachment undergoes a subjective turn, becoming primarily an ethical practice of the self. *Under Western Eyes* gives this trend an additional twist by making the impossibility of effective engagement a condition of detachment. See Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment,* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001).

[51] See Hay, "*Under Western Eyes* and the Missing Center," in *Joseph Conrad's* Under Western Eyes: *Beginnings, Revisions, Final Forms*, ed. David R. Smith (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1991), 121-151.

possessed of political agency but lack the capacity or desire for detachment that enables the discernment of "truth from lies." Conrad imagines a world in which those who can see cannot act, and those invested with power have no interest in considering the course of their actions, which are "meant to change fundamentally the lives of so many millions." *Under Western Eyes* thus shares with *Nostromo* the strange distinction of being a novel that, looking ahead to new institutional and aesthetic regimes, relies on the very principles of detachment whose erasure its formal innovations seem to foretell.

Chapter 2: Institutional Possibility in Virginia Woolf's *The Years*

> What, I asked myself, when I read Herbert Fisher's autobiography the other day, would Herbert have been without Winchester, New College, and the Cabinet? What would have been his shape had he not been stamped and moulded by that great patriarchal machine? Every one of our male relations was shot into that machine at the age of ten and emerged at sixty a Head Master, an Admiral, a Cabinet Minister, or the Warden of a college. It is as impossible to think of them as natural human beings as it is to think of a carthorse galloping wild maned and unshod over the pampas.
>
> —Virginia Woolf, *A Sketch of the Past*[1]

> Pain must outbalance pleasure two to one, she thought, in all social relations. Or am I the exception, the peculiar person? she continued, for the others seemed happy enough. Yes, she thought, looking straight ahead of her, and feeling again the stretched skin round her lips and eyes tight from the tiredness of sitting up late with a woman in childbirth, I'm the exception; hard; cold; in a groove already; merely a doctor.
>
> —Virginia Woolf, *The Years*[2]

In *A Sketch of the Past*, Virginia Woolf imagines the schools, universities, military, and Parliament of the British Empire functioning as a "great patriarchal machine," generating administrative types: the headmaster, the warden, the admiral, the

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[1] Virginia Woolf, *A Sketch of the Past*, in *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Harcourt: New York, 1976), 153.
[2] Woolf, *The Years*, ed. Eleanor McNees (New York: Harcourt, 2008), 336.

cabinet minister.[3] The effects of the machine on those who emerge from it are defining; for Woolf in this extended reminiscence the machine actually produces its individuals as individuals. Woolf's uncle Herbert Fisher's life would not have been different without the machine; his very existence would be inconceivable. In the course of *A Sketch*, which is largely about her half-brother George Duckworth, Woolf repeatedly deploys the machine as a figure for the operation of institutions not only political, military, and "intellectual," but also social: the "social machine," from which George "emerged at the age of sixty with a Lady Margaret for a wife, with a knighthood, with a sinecure of some sort, three sons, and a country house" (153). And while Woolf emphasizes the "patriarchal" nature of the machine, suggesting that men are its main product, this is the same "machine into which our rebellious [female] bodies were inserted in 1900" (152), suggesting that even if women are not always the bearers of its strictures, neither do they exist outside of a relationship to them. In a final twist, the liberty denied the men "stamped" by the machine is rendered as unimaginable as a "carthorse"—slow, drowsy, bred for work—"galloping" across the imperial hinterland those men were trained to govern. A single sentence at once evokes and undercuts the heroic imagery of imperialism that Woolf had long viewed with a mixture of contempt, amusement, and anger, while at the same time tying the men's formation not only to the English nation but also to the British Empire as a whole.

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[3] The image of society as a "machine" is a recurring on in Woolf's writing; in *The Voyage Out*, Richard Dalloway says, "Look at it this way, Miss Vinrace; conceive of the state as a complicated machine; we citizens are parts of that machine; some fulfill more important duties; others (perhaps I am one of them) serve only to connect some obscure parts of the mechanism, concealed from the public eye. Yet if the meanest screw fails in its task, the proper working of the whole is imperiled." Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (New York: Harcourt, 1920), 66.

The passage is bleak, though, and not only because of the fleeting allusions made elsewhere to the sexual abuse that George Duckworth inflicted on Woolf when she was a child. It evokes a world in which the institutions that produce modern subjects have metastasized to dominate the social landscape. Woolf suggests that the dominance of institutionalized life has two primary and related effects. The first is that, despite the social capital provided by the roles for which it forms them, the machine's male products are totally ineffectual when confronted with experiences outside the world for which they have been prepared: George is "almost brainless," incapable of meeting "any opposition" and "offer[ing] none." He has "no instinct, no ability to make him stray beyond the circle of the upper middle class world" (152); he is panicked by the young Virginia's appearance one evening in the wrong green dress. George's total embodiment of convention—"he never went an inch out of his orbit"—leads him to accept the world immediately and without reflection, and this, along with the dominance of his "physical passions" over his intellect, make him seem in a way less than human. Unaware of himself as a self, George seems incapable of ever inhabiting the perspective that the writer herself relies upon as she turns the past into prose.

Second, this social diagnosis seems to lead to an aesthetic dead end. Woolf writes that "[t]he spectacle of George, laying down laws in his leather armchair so instinctively, so unhesitatingly, fascinated me," recalling with disappointment that when "I wrote a sketch of his probable career . . . his actual career followed almost to the letter" (154). George "flow[s] into the mold without a doubt to mar the pattern," a "fossil" of more interest to the "archaeologist" (151) than to the novelist. The institutional configuration of a social landscape, in which any George or Herbert may as well be any other

headmaster, admiral, minister, or warden, seems an unrewarding object for the writer who, constructing a persona in the memoir by exploring the seemingly contingent associations among her own memories, finds nothing so deep or unpredictable in these imperial men: as the particular Herbert is revealed to be interchangeable with the generic cabinet minister, what at first appeared to be a substantial character dissipates as Woolf draws closer to him. And yet, despite this apparent impasse, as character is flattened into type by the machine's gears, the machine itself moves into the narrative foreground. George, though uninteresting in terms of his interiority or the analysis of motives and decisions privileged by classical realism, becomes a vehicle for the exploration of a world of "school reports," "scholarships," "triposes and fellowships," "social hoops," "required acts," and "tests" (152-54). Determined entirely by these prods and constraints, George reproduces them in "laying down laws" himself. *A Sketch of the Past* suggests that the evocation of character might produce not a progressively deeper excavation of self-sufficient individual subjectivity, but rather an aesthetic map of the processes by which individuals become legible through, and in turn reproduce, the habits, practices, and procedures of the modern, fully institutional social world.

In passages like this, Woolf presents the social institution as tradition, as a mechanism for the preservation of habits and practices developed in the past. What is unnerving about this section of *A Sketch* is that it suggests the hermetic nature of the relationship of the individual human being to the institution-as-tradition. Between George and the social machine is a closed feedback loop, where the stability of the individual relies on his adherence to accepted practice, and institutional practice is validated and sustained by the relative conformity of the individuals it produces. For all that this world

is an undesirable one, it is not obvious, in the scenario Woolf envisions, how novelty or change could enter into this process of static reproduction. In one sense, Woolf addressed this point elsewhere: in *Three Guineas* (1938), she imagines a "Society of Outsiders" composed of women who would work "by their own methods for liberty, equality, and peace," adopting towards militarism and patriarchy an attitude of revolutionary "indifference." But considered alongside the above passages from *A Sketch*, *Three Guineas* becomes distinctive less for its development of a revolutionary ethos than for its reinforcement of the vexed centrality of institutions in Woolf's late-career thought. *Three Guineas* was frequently taken as an excessively strident statement of female autonomy even by sympathetic contemporaries, so it can be surprising to note how much of its text is devoted to the analysis of specific British institutions—the university, Civil Service, Church, government—and to note Woolf's point that "the outsiders have only had a positive existence for twenty years—that is, since the professions were opened to the daughters of educated men."[4] In *A Sketch*, writing that the power of convention "impresses even the outsider by the sweep of its current" (153), Woolf returns to this theme, emphasizing that at the very least outsider status is never absolute; that is, it always produces and maintains itself in relation to an institutional inside. Here again, a social and an aesthetic problem intertwine: if the situation of Woolf's characters captures the reality of institutionalized life, it becomes difficult to imagine a position from which the writer herself could achieve the detachment necessary to "[c]onsider what immense forces society brings to play upon each of us, how that society changes from decade to

[4] Woolf, *Three Guineas*, ed. Jane Marcus (Harcourt, 2006), 126-27, 136.

decade, and also from class to class." At best, Woolf writes, she can "see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream" (80).

This question, of how the writer might take sufficient distance from her own formation to "describe the stream," was one Woolf engaged to varying extents throughout her career. Long before she made it a punch line in her reminiscence of Uncle Herbert, Woolf viewed as naïve the notion of the "natural human being," independent and self-sufficient, whether in psychological or political terms. She strove to capture, through character, what she called "the invisible presences" that give shape to human lives. This practice suggests an ongoing negotiation with the ways that such "presences" might shape the perspective of the writer herself, but *A Sketch of the Past*—a product of 1939, a late and difficult moment in Woolf's career—is not especially optimistic about this negotiation.[5] The Virginia Woolf who speaks in *A Sketch of the Past* stands at a slant to the machine, "seeing the circus going on" (153). Her perspective finally comes not from a rupture in institutional production, or from a pre-existing position outside of it, but from the routine and effective functioning of the institution itself: "[W]hen I hear God Save the King I too feel a current belief but almost directly I consider my own splits asunder and one side of me criticises the other [*sic*]" (153). This split gives rise to "perceptions, however slight and transient . . . [that] gave my attitude toward George a queer twist. . . . There was a spectator in me who, even while I squirmed and obeyed, remained observant" (154). When the machine in the very moment it creates the

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[5] On social forces as "invisible presences" in Woolf, see especially Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986), 3. Zwerdling's classic study takes as one of its central themes the relationship in Woolf's writing between the "inside" of consciousness and the "outside" of society, history, and politics, but he generally sees this relationship as one of influence or reflection on a thematic level, rather than mutual imbrication and reproduction at the level of form, as I do; Zwerdling refers to *The Years* only in passing.

individual produces a self-consciousness of her determination on the part *of* the individual, it echoes the constitution of *Three Guineas*' Society, the members of which become "outsiders" (indeed, have "positive existence" at all) only in the historical moment of their incorporation into the institutions of professional life. This is institutional character in a minor key, with the emphasis laid on the limits of perspective and the difficulties for the author of negotiating between institutional and individual life. This melancholic turn in Woolf's attitude to the question of institutions is confirmed by her last novel, *Between the Acts*, begun at the same time as *A Sketch*, in which, as recent critics have argued, Woolf seeks forms of continuity in national culture and the natural world, largely as a response to the failures of institutional politics in the Thirties and the rise of Fascism.[6]

A Sketch offers a particularly stark, late encapsulation of a problem that, this chapter will argue, is at the heart of the project that Woolf began almost a decade earlier, at the beginning of the 1930s. This project was initiated in the drafts of an "essay-novel" known as *The Pargiters* and published, having taken quite different form, as *Three Guineas* and the novel *The Years*. The view of institutions opened up by the epigraph from *A Sketch*, in which the writer's just-adequate perspective comes not from her exceptionality but from her embeddedness in the same institutional world as her subjects, looks back onto this chapter's second epigraph, one more properly novelistic, in which *The Years*' Peggy Pargiter contemplates her presence at the party that concludes the novel and that brings together nearly all of the characters who feature in Woolf's most

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[6] See Ben Harker, "'On different levels ourselves went forward': Pageantry, Class Politics and Narrative Form in Virginia Woolf's Late Writing," *ELH* 78 (2011): 433-456; and Sam See, "The Comedy of Nature: Darwinian Feminism in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," *Modernism/Modernity* 17 (2010): 639-667.

ambitious work. In one sense a type, "merely a doctor," a product of medical institutions whose vocabulary and habits of perception define her presence in the narrative, Peggy is at the same time a distinctive individual: she is "the exception, the peculiar person." Indeed, the marks of her peculiarity as a character—the "pain" she finds in "social relations," her hyperawareness of her body and of the bodies of others—come not from her freestanding subjectivity and deep interiority, but from her letter-perfect incarnation of what Woolf presents as the protocols and worldview of the medical professional. Embodying the push and pull, the tension and complementarity, between the individual and institutional practice, Peggy prefigures the Outsiders of *Three Guineas* and the Virginia Woolf of *A Sketch of the Past*, but she is only one of numerous characters in *The Years* to do so. In *The Years*, Woolf makes the relationship between the institution and the individual central to her practice of characterization. In the process, Woolf's still neglected late-career masterpiece reasserts a claim that theorists of the novel have commonly thought the form—and the rest of Woolf's fiction—to have abjured in the broad shift from realist representation to modernist fragmentation: a claim to capture social totality in the process of change. *The Years* is set entirely in London, but it encompasses, both thematically and formally in the institutional qualities of its characters, a world of institutions that exceed, overlap, or are in principle indifferent to national boundaries. In doing so, it suggests that British and Anglophone novels of late empire might be brought together not on the grounds of national origin or by their position in a center/periphery model, but through their shared formal investment in common aspects of the imperial world. One aspect of that world is the institution, the colleges and cabinets that made the Empire a machine.

This chapter first addresses what I suggest is the overlooked importance of the concept of character and its relationship to institutions in Woolf's classic essays on fiction. I then turn to the discarded drafts of *The Pargiters*, examining Woolf's experiments therein with a politically-charged practice of fictional representation supplemented by expository prose, and to her decision to end this practice and separate art and politics in *The Years*. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to a detailed reading of *The Years*. This reading is organized around the varied ways that Woolf generates character out of individuals' relationships to institutional contexts: Abel and Morris Pargiter's embodiment of the Army and the legal system, respectively; the exclusion of female figures such as Eleanor, Delia, Milly, and Rose Pargiter from a range of modern institutions; Sara Pargiter's professional outsiderdom (and her centrality to a set of critical debates about the novel); and the productive incorporation of Peggy and North Pargiter in the medical profession and the colonial service. The chapter maps through these individuals how *The Years* makes character out of institutions, and how the novel's plotless narrative works to reimagine the institution as a technology of inclusion and collective change, directed toward the future rather than the past.

I. THE CHARACTER OF INSTITUTIONS

James March and Johan Olsen define an institution as

> a relatively enduring collection of rules and organized practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources that are relatively invariant in the face of turnover of individuals and

> relatively resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals and changing external circumstances.[7]

Institutions "prescribe appropriate behavior," and, with a dual function of empowerment and constraint, make individuals "more or less capable of acting" (3). This is a broad definition, of course, with no necessary connection to any particular historical formation; but as I have suggested in my discussion of Conrad, one of the virtues of the novels I examine here is that they help lend more precise definition to the role of institutions in late empire, tying institutional practice to the material structures and infrastructures of the imperial world. March and Olsen's more abstract definition is worth dwelling on here, though, for its emphasis on the characterological components of the institution. *Practices*, *behaviors*, *actions*; the habituation of these modes of being into identities: in modernist novels of institutions, these are the building blocks of character—the accumulation of institutionally dictated traits into individual persons is how character itself becomes legible. At the same time, though, and as *A Sketch of the Past* demonstrates, this process of characterization generates a double movement: because these traits are shared, and partake of particular forms of collective life that tend toward de-individuation, the character who emerges constantly threatens to recede into type—Herbert or George into Headmaster or Minister. In this way character exceeds the individual and becomes a means of rendering the institution itself—"structured" or "unstructured," within or outside the realm of state power, with the potential to "extend beyond national boundaries"—but at the cost, in the novel as one might fear in life, of the individual's threatened erasure.

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[7] James March and Johan Olsen, "Elaborating the New Institutionalism," 3.

To suggest that practices, behaviors, and actions are central to certain techniques of modernist characterization may sound willfully reductive, like saying that Joyce's main achievement in *Ulysses* is his depiction of walks around Dublin. Modernism has long been thought of as having meaningfully shifted the ground of novelistic depictions of human personhood from character to consciousness. Writing in the short-lived but influential *Calendar of Modern Letters* in 1926, the critic C. H. Rickword calls character the mere "social crystallization" (161) of consciousness, arguing against contemporary critics' valorization of character and the related assumption that "character is to be regarded as a portrait of an imagined human being." Rickword argues that "'character' is merely the term by which the reader alludes to the pseudo-objective image he composes of his response to an author's verbal arrangements," and that to emphasize character's mimetic aspect leads to "irrelevant" criticism of "moral, political, social, or religious" issues, "all as though [character] possessed actual objectivity, were a figure of the inferior realm of real life" (167). Both character and plot, for Rickword, are "purely fictitious," "secondary" emanations of the unified "rhythm" characteristic of successful novels. He praises Joyce in particular for shifting the grounds of novelistic practice "within the subject," from the "report[ing]" of character to the direct dramatization of "consciousness," through which the events of the narrative are shown to be "in themselves adequate and self-sufficient" (161). In this sense the properly modernist novel divorces itself from the positive representation of anything besides sovereign consciousness. In making this move, Rickword emblematizes a broad shift in thinking about the novel, one analyzed in more pessimistic light, famously, by Lukács, who argues that modernist "subjectivism" actually presents a "static" view of the world that depicts

consciousness divorced from the dynamic movement of history and society.[8] More recently, Jesse Matz reframes this shift in the history of the form as a move from social totality to "perceptual totality": "[The novel] had done social life on a massive scale and scaled itself down to individual psychologies."[9] This would seem to be particularly true of Woolf, whose "concern," as Peter Nicholls writes, "with the rhythms of the inner life. . . . is very different from the avowedly 'public' interests of the 'Men of 1914.'"[10]

But thirty-plus years of scholarship on Woolf, inaugurated by feminist critics such as Jane Marcus and Rachel Blau Duplessis, and catalyzed by Alex Zwerdling's monumental *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (itself a critique of earlier feminist scholarship), have demolished the image of Woolf as a fragile and isolated "woman writer." We have become accustomed to a view of Woolf that emphasizes her feminism, her activism, and her place in what Christine Froula has termed "the Bloomsbury avant-garde," a politically and culturally engaged milieu that situated Woolf at the epicenter of political and artistic innovation in England. Along with this revived understanding of Woolf's own commitments has come a broad acknowledgment that Woolf's entire *oeuvre* is engaged in working through a series of complex social and political questions: with "how people are shaped (or deformed) by their social environment, by how historical forces impinge on an individual life and shift its course, by how class, money, and gender help to determine a person's fate," as Zwerdling writes (14). Most recently, scholarship has moved from an emphasis on the chronological middle of Woolf's career

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[8] See Lukács, "The Ideology of Modernism," in *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle*, trans. John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).
[9] Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 1.
[10] Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995), 268.

(*Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves*) to its temporal and thematic margins, and from questions of identity and feminism to politics and cosmopolitanism, embodied in the colonial themes of *The Voyage Out* and concepts of the nation, community, and war in the posthumous *Between the Acts*.

While addressing the types of "moral, political, social, or religious" issues in Woolf that modernism's turn to consciousness had putatively allowed it to abandon, however, modernist scholarship has tended to retain the vocabulary of consciousness to the exclusion of the vocabulary of character. Indeed, just as Rickword appraises the modernist shift from character to consciousness in terms of Joyce's move *toward* consciousness, later critics have tended to speak of Woolf in terms of her move *away* from character: As Baruch Hochman writes, "Many things did not interest Woolf, and character in its classical sense was one of them" (157). Edward Bishop, writing on *Jacob's Room* but with implications for Woolf's method more generally, argues that "in the figure of Jacob Woolf is not representing *character*; what she is exploring is the construction, and representation of, the subject" (148). Behind critical assertions like these lie certain assumptions about the presentation of consciousness, grounded in the texts most often taken to comprise Woolf's aesthetic manifesto. In "Modern Fiction," "Mr. Bennett & Mrs. Brown," and "Character in Fiction," Woolf argues against what she terms the "materialist" approach of the "Edwardian" novelists, including Arnold Bennettt, H. G. Wells, and John Galsworthy, and for the "spiritual" method of the "Georgians," whom we now know as modernists: Joyce, Lawrence, and, by implication, herself. "Modern Fiction," the earliest (published in an early form in 1919) and most

quotably aphoristic of these pieces, contains lines commonly taken as Woolf's analysis of her own method:

> Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with a sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from old. . . . Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. (10)

Passages like this one have, understandably, made the exaltation of the "ordinary" through the rendering of "consciousness" a key concept for thinking about Woolf's fiction. With the emphasis on consciousness comes its entailment of a presumed turn inward in Woolf's ambitions for novelistic art that continues to pervade critical understandings of her self-conception as a writer: opposing "impressions" and their "pattern . . . upon the consciousness" to the Edwardians' "villas" and "railway carriages," Woolf seems to oppose the inner life to the outer, the private and particular to the public and general, tilting the scales toward the former in each case.

What is not often noted, however, in the expansions of Woolf's argument that "Mr. Bennett & Mrs. Brown" and "Character in Fiction" represent, is that she noticeably shifts the grounds of her discussion, from some passing mentions of consciousness to an intense focus on questions of "character." "Mr. Bennett & Mrs. Brown" (which reworks

and expands on the argument of "Modern Fiction") opens with the statement (in response to, and agreement with, Bennett) that "the novel is a very remarkable machine for the creation of human character . . . directly it ceases to create character, its defects alone are visible."[11] "This character-making power," Woolf writes, is the "essence" of the novel—a claim that calls into question the unproblematic assimilation of Woolf to that critical tradition, from Rickword to Nicholls and Matz, that associates modernist fiction with the dispersal of character.

The essays are deceptive in that, while Woolf concedes Bennett and the Edwardians the primacy of character, her rhetoric emphasizes her quarrel with them; in "Mr. Bennett & Mrs. Brown" she develops more fully her idea of a generational divide between Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy and the "Georgians." And indeed, in "Character in Fiction," the last, most programmatic and most substantial of the essays, Woolf's parody of the Edwardians, whom she famously describes as "giv[ing] us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there," lends further support to the idea that she has set up the rendering of consciousness or the inner life in place of the exploration of the social world:

> I asked them—they are my elders and betters—How shall I begin to describe this woman's character? And they said, "Begin by saying that her father kept a shop in Harrogate. Ascertain the rent. Ascertain the wages of shop assistants in the year 1878. Discover

[11] "Mr. Bennett & Mrs. Brown," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, 6 vol. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1988), 3:384.

> what her mother died of. Describe cancer. Describe calico. Describe—" But I cried "Stop! Stop!"[12]

Woolf figures Edwardian fiction as vulgar social realism, in which external detail is accumulated endlessly as a means of elucidating the conditions of injustice. In the repetitive, stultifying diction of the "elders and betters"—begin, ascertain, ascertain, discover, describe, describe, describe—there is more than a little of the George Duckworths and Cousin Herberts of *A Sketch*; Edwardian novels, like Edwardians, "flow into the mold without a doubt to mar the pattern." And, though Woolf writes that these novels "leave one with so strange a feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction" that "in order to complete them it feels necessary to do something—to join a society or, more desperately, to write a cheque" (3:427), her parody suggests that it is through their overt concern with social justice that they fail both aesthetically and politically when they collapse these two spheres into each other.

And yet Woolf's opposition to the means employed by the Edwardians does not imply a radical break with what earlier generations had imagined to be the novel's ends. Woolf is at pains, especially in "Character in Fiction," to insist that the debate is about the proper "tools": "They [the Edwardians] have made tools and established conventions which do their business. But those tools are not our tools, and that business is not our business. For us those conventions are ruin, those tools are death" (3:430). The issue is then not exactly (or only) one of replacing outmoded forms of realist character with the diaphanous modernist transcription of consciousness; rather, what appear at first as debates over novelistic content (inner or outer world?), and then over literary devices

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[12] Woolf, "Character in Fiction," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 3:432.

(consciousness or character?), are revealed as divergent approaches to form and method: how is character, the "essence" of the novel, best rendered to take advantage of the unique possibilities it presents for capturing the totality of social life?

Matz makes a similar observation in his *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*, writing that "[Woolf's] real adversary is less Bennett's writing than his rules: Bennett and others had said she could not create character, and Woolf wanted to defend herself not only by reversing the claim and proving Edwardian character lifeless, but by proving that to specify any single method for characterization (or any other aspect of fiction) is to destroy the freedom fiction needs to thrive."[13] Matz argues that this purposeful refusal to specify method in the essays is related to Woolf's embrace of an aesthetic of failure in the fiction: "Failure, if anything, is her answer to Arnold Bennett, since failure is a sure sign of the effort to make it new" (174). Matz lays out a complex dialectic in which Woolf deploys the "impression"—a fleeting yet tangible "experience of essence"—as a process of mediation between the essential and the inessential in an attempt to capture "life itself," a term which, like "method," is allowed to remain undefined (175). What this produces is a sort of negative freedom, in which the writer attempts to fuse "essential insight" and "material life," often associating the opposing terms with pairs of characters, without ever being able to say exactly what fusion would entail or what its outcome would be. The pursuit of this freedom, through the manipulation of the dialectic, is Woolf's project: "'failure' stands at least for the freedom of provisional effort" (175).

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[13] Matz, 174.

Matz helpfully dispenses with the idea that Woolf's essays represent a radical break with the writers she criticizes; as he puts it, "so winning was Virginia Woolf's argument . . . that it is surprising to find there is hardly any argument there at all" (174). Part of the non-argument at the core of the essays is tied to Woolf's vagueness about method: "Any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express, if we are writers" (10). It is true that she does not shy away from productive failure, at least as a necessary stage in remaking the novel, writing in "Character in Fiction" that "we must reconcile ourselves to a season of failures and fragments" (53); that we should "tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure" (54); and in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" that the Georgians "are at once the least successful, and the most interesting, generation that English literature has known for a hundred years" (36). But the idea that Woolf's essays mark a radical break in the history of the novel persists in Matz's suggestion that for Woolf the representation of *perceptual* totality replaces *social* totality, and in the related critical tendency to see Woolf's construction of a phenomenology of perception as first among her preoccupations throughout her novelistic writing.[14]

The essays themselves ultimately belie these suggestions. In them, we can see Woolf moving toward a particular concept of character, and toward a suspicion that fidelity to consciousness in itself is not a meaningful goal. Joyce she describes as "concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its

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[14] The exploration of the relationship of consciousness to reality, and in particular that relationship's imbrication with turn-of-the-century Cambridge philosophy, is an important facet of Woolf's career, as established authoritatively by Ann Banfield in her *The Phantom Table* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000). Woolf's innovation in this area, I want to suggest, does not overshadow her work's continuities with realist practice and the presentation of totality.

messages through the brain"; does he not, Woolf asks, "centre" us "in a self which, in spite of its tremor of susceptibility, never embraces or creates what is outside itself and beyond?" (xx). Whether or not one agrees with this critique of Joyce—which, though typically described as issuing from Woolf's squeamishness about *Ulysses'* "indecency," is more substantially about character and consciousness—Woolf's often-overlooked turn to character seems calculated to emphasize that effective novel-writing depends on precisely the relationship between the imagined individual and the social world.[15] If "consciousness" seems to mark for Woolf an attention to the "recording of the atoms" that threatens to become self-limiting, "character" suggests something like what Rickword calls, pejoratively, the "social crystallization" of that consciousness, its relationship to the "moral, social, political, and religious"; only for Woolf, in the 1930s, this social quality has ceased to be something to deride. It becomes instead the "essential" quality of a properly novelistic art. Not consciousness in and for itself, then; but through "the workings of the mind" to capture character's essentially social nature.

In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and "Character in Fiction" Woolf returns repeatedly to the idea that character alone allows the novel to incorporate the full complexity of the social world. In Thackeray's *Pendennis*, she writes, "The whole country, the whole society, is revealed to us, and revealed always in the same way, through the astonishing vividness and reality of the characters" (33). Likewise,

> [Bennett] says that it is only if the characters are real that the novel has any chance of surviving. . . . if you take a larger view I think

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[15] As Rachel Bowlby observes, even when Woolf is most focused on psychology, the "complex internal world [of the mind] is, nonetheless, externally derived." Bowlby, "Foreword" to *A Concise Companion to Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), xx.

> that Mr Bennett is perfectly right. If, that is, you think of the novels which seem to you great novels—*War and Peace, Vanity Fair, Tristram Shandy, Madame Bovary, Pride and Prejudice, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Villette*—if you think of these books, you do at once think of some character who has seemed to you so real (I do not mean by that so lifelike) that it has the power to make you think not merely of itself, but of all sorts of things through its eyes—of religion, of love, of war, of peace, of family life, of balls in country towns, of sunsets, moonrises, the immortality of the soul. . . . all these great novelists have brought us to see whatever they wish us to see through some character. Otherwise, they would not be novelists; but poets, historians, or pamphleteers. (43)

If the demands Woolf places on character here are, as I am arguing, of particular relevance to her own historical moment, her examples are nonetheless exclusively drawn from classical nineteenth-century realism. In this sense Woolf's point is backward-looking and literary-historical rather than methodological; hence the gently ironized, distinctively Victorian flavor of the "sorts of things" made available to the reader in the great works of nineteenth-century literature (that is, the novels and the social phenomena she lists correspond to each other; there is no suggestion here that "balls in country towns," for example, are among the proper concerns of the modern novelist). In this way the passage follows her reluctance to specify a method for modern characterization. But more broadly, what the passage highlights is Woolf's understanding of a necessary and persistent relationship between the "real[ity]" of character and collective forms of life. As

Jessica Berman writes, "For Woolf, [social, historical, and political] concerns become appropriate in a novel when they are made intrinsic to the characters themselves rather than simply included as representations of its intellectual context, its material conditions, or its impact on the outside world."[16] In *The Years*, this approach takes its most concrete form in a set of experiments in institutional character: experiments that maintain character as the "essence" and center of novelistic art, and thus, on Woolf's terms, maintain the self-sufficiency of the novel form itself. But because character is made out of the agglomeration of practices, behaviors, and actions that comprise a particular set of modern institutions, this is a peculiar type of self-sufficiency in which the form is grounded in features of its historical moment. By the late 1930s, I want to suggest, Woolf had arrived at a conception of the aesthetic and the social as relating to each other in what Leela Gandhi terms "interested autonomy"; but, as the long incubation of her project suggests, she did not arrive at this position overnight.[17]

II. THE FAILURE OF *THE PARGITERS*

Shortly after *The Years* was published, Woolf wrote to Stephen Spender that she had sought

> to give a picture of society as a whole; give characters from every side; turn them towards society, not private life; exhibit the effect of ceremonies; Keep one toe on the ground by means of dates, facts: envelop the whole in a changing temporal atmosphere;

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[16] Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 133.
[17] See Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2006).

> Compose into one vast many-sided group at the end; and then shift the stress from present to future; and show the old fabric insensibly changing without death or violence into the future—suggesting that there is no break, but a continuous development, possibly a recurrence of some pattern; of which of course we actors are ignorant.[18]

Nowhere else in Woolf's commentary on the novel—and there is a great deal of it, accumulated in diaries, letters, and drafts over six years of often miserable work—does she offer so concentrated an account of the project she had undertaken. Her aesthetic ambition to capture "society as a whole," and her political optimism in trying to imagine historical change "without death or violence," are unmistakable. Yet the letter also contains what critics have too often taken as Woolf's final verdict on the project, one that would seem to confirm Matz's thesis: "Of course," she writes, "[*The Years*] was an utter failure." Given the extended timeframe involved, though (1931-1937), and the mutability of Woolf's own thoughts on that matter (at around the same time, she wrote in her diary, "There is no need whatever in my opinion to be unhappy about The Years. It seems to me to come off at the end"), it seems more accurate to say that if the novel is in some sense a failure, it is primarily because, over the arduous period of its composition, Woolf shifted the terms by which she could have considered it a success.[19]

What this shift entailed was a revision of how Woolf conceived of the novel embodying the relationship between her aesthetics and her politics. *The Years*, and the

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[18] *The Letters of Virginia Woolf,* ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautman, 7 vol. (New York: Harcourt, 1980), 6:116.
[19] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell with Andrew McNeillie, 5 vol. (New York: Harcourt, 1984), 5:38.

years of its composition, had a chastening effect on both—or, more precisely, on the extent to which Woolf envisioned either one directly fueling the other. Having embarked in *The Pargiters* on a project of "intellectual argument in the form of art," she would never again attempt so direct a synthesis of what, in her 1929 essay "Women and Fiction," she called the political "gadfly" and the artistic "butterfly."[20] By the time she published a 1936 article in the *Socialist Worker*, "Why Art Today Follows Politics," Woolf was arguing that the artist involves herself in political activity precisely to preserve her art's independence from politics; while in "The Leaning Tower," she sharply criticized the left-wing poets of the thirties for "the pedagogic, the didactic, the loud-speaker strain that dominates" their "politician's poetry."[21] Yet at the same time, *Three Guineas* is Woolf's most explicitly political work; and "Why Art" and "The Leaning Tower" both assert a relationship, however oblique, between literature and the social world in which it is composed and circulates. In "Why Art," she argues that "the writer is in such close touch with human life that any agitation in his subject matter must change his angle of vision" ("Why Art," 230). In "The Leaning Tower" she suggests that the political creativity relies on an aesthetic sensibility: "We can help England very greatly . . . if we borrow the books she lends us and if we read them critically" ("Leaning Tower"180). Even earlier, in *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf wrote that "fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners."[22] Artistic creation and political advocacy are distinct realms of human endeavor; yet in their distinctness they are mutually imbricated. The development of this

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[20] Woolf, *Diary* 4:161; "Women and Fiction," *Collected Essays*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, 4 vol. (New York: Harcourt, 1967), 2: 147.
[21] Woolf, "The Leaning Tower," *Collected Essays*, 2:175-76.
[22] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, 1929), 41.

position spans much of Woolf's career. In 1925, as Alex Zwerdling notes in *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*, Woolf declared that in *Mrs. Dalloway* she hoped "to criticise the social system, & show it at work, at its most intense." The desire both to "show" and to "criticize" was also behind Woolf's idea, in January 1931, of a "novel-essay," combining sections of historical fiction interspersed with critical commentary and explication: "I have this moment, while having my bath, conceived an entire new book—a sequel to a Room of Ones Own—about the sexual life of women: to be called Professions for Women perhaps—Lord how exciting!"

In this spirit Woolf began work the following year on the earliest version of *The Years*, the first sections of which were edited by Mitchell Leaska and published in 1977 as *The Pargiters*. At their most ambitious, the critical interchapters of *The Pargiters* not only make explicit the fiction's implicit social critique, but also seek to overcome what Woolf sees as the representational limits of the novel in her own cultural moment. In the second fictional chapter, for example, young Rose is repeatedly accosted by a suspicious man on her trip to and from the store:

> When she reached the pillar box there was the man again. He was leaning against it, as if he were ill, Rose thought, filled with the same terror again; [but] he was lit up by the lamp. There was nobody else anywhere in sight. As she ran past him, he gibbered some nonsense at her, sucking his lips in & out; & began to undo his clothes . . .[23]

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[23] Woolf, *The Pargiters*, ed. Mitchell Leaska (New York: Harcourt, 1977), 43. Ellipses in original.

Later, when her sister Eleanor asks Rose why she can't sleep, Rose cowers mutely: "'But I can't tell Eleanor' she was saying to herself" (48). The interchapter commentary glosses Rose's experience in a passage worth quoting at length, as it draws together Woolf's awareness of the limits and possibilities of aesthetic creation with the structures of social and sexual repression that she was attempting to represent in this part of the novel-essay:

> This instinct to turn away and hide the true nature of the experience, either because it is too complex to explain or because of the sense of guilt that seems to adhere to it and to make concealment necessary, has, of course, prevented both the novelist from dealing with it in fiction—it would be impossible to find any mention of such feelings in the novels that were being written by Trollope, Mrs Gaskell, Mrs Oliphant, George Meredith, during the eighties. . . . In addition, there is, as the three dots used after the sentence "He unbuttoned his clothes. . ." testify, a convention, supported by law, which forbids, whether rightly or wrongly, any plain description of the sight that Rose, in common with many other little girls, saw under the lamp post by the pillar box in the dusk of that March evening. All the novelist can do, therefore, in order to illustrate this aspect of sexual life, is to state some of the facts; but not all; and then to imagine the impression on the nerves, on the brain; on the whole being, of a shock which the child instinctively conceals, as Rose did . . . and is also too ignorant, too

> childish, too frightened, to describe or explain even to herself, as Rose again was. (51)

Woolf thus attempts to account both for what is in the fiction and for what cannot appear there, not by naming the experience itself but by explaining why it can't be named. It's not difficult, then, to see why she became frustrated with *The Pargiters*: the explanations constantly threaten to obscure more than they reveal, as each layer of meta-commentary moves further away from its object. The division of narrative labor that this technique produces ultimately comes to seem like Woolf's failure live up to her own ambitions for novelistic character. Individuals in *The Pargiters*' fiction are isolated monads whose thoughts are faithfully recorded by the narrator, while the interchapters attempt, at length and with considerable clanking of the machinery, to account for the external world of institutions that produced those individuals' thoughts.

The fourth interchapter essay, for example, analyzes Edward Pargiter and his inherited ideas about women. It combines an insistence on the institutional transmissibility of character with an almost overwrought awareness of the futility of the descriptive method Woolf had chosen: "[N]obody who was not first at Rexby or St. James's and then at Benedict's in the summer of 1880 could possibly understand the force of the traditions and influences" (76); "to give the full effect of all this . . . would be entirely impossible" (77); "A highly educated foreigner failed completely to understand . . . a working man would be equally at a loss" (78). And indeed, the comprehension of character is inhibited rather than enabled in passages like the following, which occur with greater and greater frequency as the draft progresses:

> That scene, though it may possibly throw some light upon the problems that worried Edward's younger brother Bobby when he first went to a public school and therefore indirectly explain his sister Rose's anger in the bathroom, and her consequent refusal to go "beetling" with Bobby in the Round Pond, is inevitably imperfect[.]

This passage—only one example among many—loops back on itself, each insight offering another connection and demanding further explication, a movement only arrested by the admission of failure in the final clause. The very syntax of *The Pargiters* moves backwards, contradicting at the level of style Woolf's stated interest in "the future" and "continuous development." Her imperative to "give a faithful and detailed account" produces an exercise in the accumulation of contextual detail, no amount of which will ever equal the whole of an individual's motivation, and a return to the tired binaries of inside/outside, private/public for which Woolf had pilloried the Edwardians some years before: the fiction shows us individuals acting, and the authorial commentary tells us why. As Leaska notes in his introduction to the drafts, the *OED* defines a "pargeter" as "a plasterer; a whitewasher," and if Woolf's aim in her novel-essay was to bring to light through the Pargiters institutional aspects of the modern world that they themselves "whitewash," recognizing only intermittently or not at all, she was frequently tripped up by her own ambition.[24]

Woolf's abandonment of the novel-essay, then, in February 1933, constituted the moment in which she concluded that the political and the aesthetic would remain, for her,

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[24] See Woolf, *The Pargiters*, xiv.

autonomous spheres, even as a deepened understanding of one might produce effects in the other—the point she would argue in "Why Art" and "The Leaning Tower." But her change of emphasis involved an expansion rather than a diminution of her plans for the project:

> I want to give the whole of the present society—nothing less: facts, as well as vision. And to combine them both. . . . It should aim at immense breadth and immense intensity. It should include satire, comedy, poetry, narrative, & what form is to hold them all together? Should I bring in a play, letters, poems? I think I begin to grasp the whole. And its to end with the press of daily normal life continuing. And there are to be millions of ideas but no preaching—history, politics, feminism, art, literature—in short a summing up of all I know, feel, laugh at, despise, like admire hate & so on.[25]

"No preaching": that is, not an argument, but the created totality of a protean aesthetic form, informed by her politics but also by much else. Likewise, in advice to her nephew Julian Bell: "I don't see why you should worry yourself to write a novel. . . . I wish is that you'd invent some medium that's half poetry half play half novel. (Three halves, I see; well, you must correct my arithmetic.)"[26] None of those halves, significantly, involves an essay. And if the finished version was finally not the all-encompassing *tour de force* that Woolf had hoped for in her more optimistic moments, this is in large part because she returned fully to the novel form as such, saving political argument for *Three Guineas* and

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[25] Woolf, *Diaries* 4:151.
[26] Virginia Woolf to Julian Bell, 21 May 1936, *Letters* 6:38.

the incorporation of other forms (particularly drama, but also poetry) for *Between the Acts*. If, for Woolf, the "essence" of the novel lies in the creation of character, *The Years* is her most properly novelistic work.

The Years works to fulfill Woolf's ambition for a totalizing mode of character, in which character emerges out of a formal tension and a thematic feedback with an array of institutions—city club, colonial service, military, university, legal system, finance, medicine, domestic service, popular press, white-collar professions. The novel's institutions overlap with the operations of sovereign power, but in their diversity and in Woolf's attention to the unintended consequences of their operation, they exceed incorporation into a model of analysis based on the relationship between the individual and any unified concept of "the state." Likewise, they share at points the thematic terrain covered by the Foucauldian critique of modern subjectivity as produced by the hospital, the prison, and the asylum, but Woolf in *The Years* maintains a certain optimism about the ordering effects of institutional life, an attention to the imperial rather than merely local or national ramifications of institutions, and a pre-structuralist liberal humanism. Recall that institutions are "organized practices" and "constitutive rules" that are "carriers of identities and roles." They receive social and economic validation, are durable across time, and are relatively, although not absolutely, unaffected by the preferences of individuals. Institutions enable forms of action and lend meaning to individual lives, but they also impose constraints, setting limits on what actions are plausible and thus on what types of lives are imaginable. And yet, as March and Olsen point out, "institutions are not merely static," and so the question of institutional change is central to the project of

representing a fully institutionalized social world.[27] *The Years* captures at the level of novelistic form that "changing temporal atmosphere," the "old fabric insensibly changing without death or violence into the future"; how institutions change across time, and how new types of lives become livable.

III. *THE YEARS*

In its opening sections, *The Years* seems to foreclose on the idea that an individual could occupy a social position outside of institutional life—or that such a thing as a legible character could precede the rules and practices that enable and constrain the emergence of character as such. We meet Abel Pargiter in his unnamed club, and within this space Abel first appears as merely one among many, a name only, otherwise indistinguishable from the individuals around him: "Colonel Abel Pargiter was sitting after luncheon in his club talking. Since his companions in the leather armchairs were men of his own type, men who had been soldiers, civil servants, men who had now retired, they were reviving with old jokes and stories now their past in India, Africa, Egypt" (4). The language of the passage lends causal force to the linkage of institutional history with type and type with action or habit: "since" these individuals were formed as soldiers or civil servants, they now converse in this way. The narrator describes their conversation as pertaining to "some appointment, to some possible appointment"(4), and the indirect conveyance of this bit of dialogue, which is marked *as* dialogue only by the narrator's subtle aping of the men's slightly self-important, repetitive way of talking, implies that this is the speech not of a particular character but of a group: it is immaterial

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[27] March and Olsen, "Elaborating the New Institutionalism," 11.

which of "the three baldish and greyish heads" has actually said it, or indeed whether exactly these words have been said at all. It is the indirect discourse not of Abel or his companions specifically but of what the narrator herself refers to as a particular imperial "type."

This narrative process, in which indirectly reported speech seems to emanate not from an individual but from a institutionally structured collective, is prefigured a few pages earlier, in the first of the short, broad-focus interludes that Woolf places between the chapters of *The Years*: "It was an uncertain spring . . . but in April such weather was to be expected. Thousands of shop assistants made that remark, as they handed neat parcels to ladies in flounced dresses standing on the other side of the counter at Whiteley's and the Army and Navy stores" (1). Again, via the narrator's indirect reportage, the speech of any particular shop assistant becomes the speech of the Shop Assistant, a type instantiated by any of "thousands" of particular individuals, all of whom might as well as not be saying the same words at the same moment anywhere in London.[28] Rachel Blau Duplessis has argued that one of Woolf's feminist innovations in *The Years* is the creation of a "choral," "group," or "communal protagonist," "a way of organizing the work so that neither the development of an individual against a backdrop of supporting characters nor the formation of a heterosexual couple is central to the novel," a point relevant to the issues of individuality and anonymous collectivity that

[28] Elizabeth F. Evans argues that these interludes serve both to dramatize and to undercut an "authoritative version of the world seen from 'on high," an aerial perspective associated, in Evans's argument, with Fascist aesthetics. Evans, "Air War, Propaganda, and Woolf's Anti-Tyranny Aesthetic," *Modern Fiction Studies* 59 (2013): 71.

these passages raise.[29] Margaret Comstock makes a similar argument, writing that the novel is composed "on aesthetic principles that are the opposite of fascist. It has no center or central figure around which subordinate elements can be arranged."[30] But while this reading does help illuminate the structure of the relationships among the characters who actually populate the novel as discrete individuals, it does not account for those characters' processes of emergence from an anonymous, though not innumerable, multitude of individuals who occupy the same institutional positions. In light of the establishment of this structure on the novel's first page, Abel's emergence as a full-fledged character a few pages later cannot but seem somewhat arbitrary—there are thousands of his type sitting in the rooms of other clubs; indeed, we know there are others in the very same room.

So, a paragraph into the scene, it is not immediately clear who the man speaking, "the youngest and sprucest of the three" (4), actually is; it may be Abel, though it turns out to be "Major Elkin." The description, at first, attaches to no individual; it is significant only relatively, in that it lessens slightly the interchangeability of the men (one is younger and sprucer than the others). Abel himself separates from the group only when he tires of the conversation, "[throwing] himself back in his chair," and his physical appearance gains specificity: "He sat staring ahead of him with bright blue eyes that seemed a little screwed up, as if the glare of the East were still in them; and puckered at

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[29] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985), 162-63. Similarly, Alison Booth argues that Woolf's "work increasingly enacts the breakdown of ego boundaries . . . to turn to the first-person pronoun 'we'" (*Greatness Engendered* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992], 5), and Maria DiBattista points out Woolf's "creative conjunctions of the first-person plural that invoked neither a royal nor an editorial but a choric we" (*Imagining Virginia Woolf* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009], 25).

[30] Margaret Comstock, "The Loudspeaker and the Human Voice: Politics and the Form of *The Years*," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 80.2 (1976-1977): 254.

the corners as if the dust were still in them" (5). Perhaps surprisingly, Abel begins to emerge as an *individual* here only by reference to his place in the military bureaucracy of "the East," a professional world in which personal distinction was subordinated, as B. B. Misra writes, to "efficiency . . . achieved within the framework of institutional and legal constraint imposed on the exercise of discretionary authority" and "rationalization . . . based on the principle of bureaucratic impersonality which was not supposed to recognize political or social differentiations."[31] Abel gains distinctiveness on the page only because he has been selected out of the many indistinguishable Englishmen in the background of the novel who similarly beheld that "glare"—that is, who participated in project of the British Empire in India and have returned to the metropolitan center to reminisce in their clubs. But this superficially contradictory assertion (Abel is individuated through his institutional incorporation) betrays a more meaningful tension underlying the process of characterization in these passages. Abel's thoughts in themselves are not particularly distinctive; his is not an especially lively consciousness, if the value of Woolf's modernism lies in rendering that elusive entity; and indeed, many critics of *The Years* have pointed out that characters' thoughts and dialogue frequently trail off or go conspicuously unreported. But this inattention to the interesting consciousness of individuals (or the uninterestingness of their consciousness when revealed) is less a sign of aesthetic failure than an indication that the novel's investments lay elsewhere. With the price that Abel's coherence as an individual is always in question, because it seems as though he could recede at any time back into mere type, what at first seems like a

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[31] B. B. Misra, *The Bureaucracy in India* (Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 91.

contradiction—the co-presence of the individual and the institution in each other—is actually the tension that produces character.[32]

In this first scene, the narration focuses on Abel only once he is alone, his companions physically absent or departing, "hurrying through the door" or "talk[ing] to another man" (5). From here, the trajectory of the process by which his individuality is developed is, in a sense, reversed. In the opening passages, putatively collective speech and description are narrowed until we gain a sense of the individual. Now, the individual that has emerged gains distinctive features that are only subsequently, but definitively, revealed to be products of an institutional context and role. Abel visits his mistress, Mira, and touches her neck "with the hand that had lost two fingers, rather lower down, where the neck joins the shoulders"; a page later, "the hand that had lost two fingers began to fumble rather lower down where the neck joins the shoulders" (8, 9). The uncanny repetition of the phrase, along with the disquieting detail of the lost fingers, raises a question that is not answered for several pages, when, at tea with his family, Abel's hand again "fumble[s]," and we learn that "[h]e had lost two fingers of the right hand in the Mutiny, and the muscles had shrunk so that the right hand resembled the claw of some

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[32] In his essay "Characters Lounge," *Modern Language Quarterly* 70 (2009): 291-317, Aaron Kunin suggests that type is the real truth of character, because the recognition of types across the innumerable variety of texts in which they may reside makes character is "a formal device that collects every example of a kind of person" (291). Thus, "communities of characters bridge individual fictions and genres, as well as orders of reality such as history and fiction, given and made, and life and death" (316). But while imagined individuals certainly can travel widely, the processes by which imagined individuals are evoked in the first place are form-specific and, I would argue, historically variable; that is, if characters travel easily across genre and period, the mechanisms through which characters are evoked do not, or do not do so as readily, and this is one of the ways that the novel form is embedded in history. In the texts I discuss in this study, characters emerge not only in relation to each other but in relation to the institutions that increasingly dominate the world of the novel; thus character then might better be called in some cases "a formal device that collects every example of a kind of person within a given institutional context."

aged bird" (13). The gap in an individual history is filled by collective history; physical trauma for Abel is revealed to be a product of the imperial trauma of the Mutiny.

Abel grows from an absence—one among any number of "men of his type" in this early scene (and indeed, one among many returned colonial officials in Woolf's *oeuvre*)—into a presence in the novel, an individual who relates to other individuals, through his accumulation of personal traits generated by an imperial, and institutional, training. But the process takes away as it gives; institutional incorporation is context-dependent, and the shared traits that allow for the expansion of individual character in one context reduce character to type in others. This technique can produce quite subtle effects: Abel is consistently referred to as "Colonel Abel Pargiter" or "Colonel Pargiter" in the club, but when the scene shifts to Mira's seedy flat and then to the Pargiter household, he is notably reduced to "the Colonel"—the reduction of proper name to functional title neatly illustrating how Abel is, curiously, most "human" when most fully incorporated into his formative context. The diminution of the name in the move to the domestic corresponds, moreover, to a diminution of Abel's personality:

> "Cut along," said the Colonel imperiously. Martin got up and went, drawing his hand reluctantly along the chairs and tables as if to delay his passage. He slammed the door rather sharply behind him. The Colonel rose and stood upright among them in his tightly-buttoned frock coat.
>
> "And I must be off too," he said. But he paused a moment, as if there were nothing particular for him to be off to. He stood

there very erect among them, as if he wished to give some order, but could not at the moment think of any order to give.

The misalignment of the domestic context with the Colonel's military bearing produces a sort of seizure of character; Abel is suspended between the "order" of the bureaucrat or commanding officer and the circumstances of the family home, where that form of order has little purchase. In overlaying the language of military command on the routine of domestic life, and perhaps having some fun with the irony of impotent Abel's "upright," "erect" posture, the passage quite clearly anticipates the equation and critique of militarism, patriarchy, and Fascism that Woolf would undertake in *Three Guineas*.[33] My point, though, is less to draw attention to the social critique that scenes like this perform (a critique on which much criticism of the novel has focused) than to demonstrate how Woolf's characters come to life *as characters* through their relationship to the institutions that are implicated in politics. *The Years*, as London-centered as any of Woolf's novels, becomes imperial fiction not by addressing the politics of late empire thematically (though at times it does), but by incorporating the supranational institutions of the Empire into formal processes of characterization. As Carl Sandburg wrote shortly after her death, Woolf in her writing created a "personal British Empire"; *The Years* confirms this idea more literally than Sandburg may have intended.[34]

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[33] As Jane Marcus writes, "The patriarchal family is violently assaulted as the source of fascism in *The Years.*" Marcus, *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), 77. Marcus and numerous other feminist critics have drawn out the implications of this aspect of Woolf's politics; it is also been the aspect for which she has historically been criticized the most, perhaps most famously by her nephew Quentin Bell in his biography, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972).

[34] Carl Sandburg, "Virginia Woolf's Personal Decision," in *Home Front Memo* (Harcourt, 1943), 54; cited in Kurt Koenigsberger, *The Novel and the Menagerie* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2007), 178.

Alex Woloch's *The One vs. the Many*, which demonstrates how the characters that populate novels are differentiated as they vie for narrative attention in a "character-system," suggests a partial account of how character works in *The Years*. Indeed, the standard critical account of *The Years* as a failure may in part be a result of its remarkably egalitarian character-system; if, as Woloch argues, realist narrative is generated out of an *asymmetric* distribution of narrative attention, it is easy to see why *The Years* is unable to tell a story: narrative attention is too *evenly* dispersed across its "communal protagonist." But this makes *The Years* all the more interesting for its exemplification of processes of institutional characterization, a field of character formation in which the actions, behaviors, and personal features that make fictional individuals legible in the first place also threaten those individuals' status as full-fledged characters. Their relationship not to other characters but to the impersonal practices of institutional life pulls them incessantly from the distinction of one *versus* many to the uncertain status of one *among* many; that is, from distinctive individual to institutional type. The hierarchy established by distributing narrative attention differently among individuals is not the only way that characters are structured *The Years*; characters emerge not only in relation to other individuals but also in relation to the collections of practices that comprise institutions. Abel Pargiter is an early and relatively anodyne example of this process of emergence and incorporation at work in *The Years*, but as the rest of the novel's first section shows, the process plays a role in the production of all of its characters. The central event of the "1880" section is the death of Rose Pargiter, Abel's wife, but the series of vignettes the section stages at the Pargiter home in London and in Oxford establishes institutional context as constitutive of characters' lives. It also

suggests a division between negative and positive sides of this process, a division that generally maps onto gender difference. Edward, the eldest son, becomes an Oxford don; Morris becomes a lawyer; Martin joins the Army. The Pargiter men and boys consistently take shape in the generative pull between individuation and incorporation; even young Martin, entering the house silently carrying books, speaks at tea only to announce his rank at the top of his class (12). Woolf's rendering of female characters, however, in acknowledgment of the section's late-Victorian setting, generally relies on exclusion as a means of definition. As one character says in an early draft of the novel, in language that anticipates *Three Guineas* and was cut from the finished version, women "are absolutely uneducated; they have received nothing from . . . the institutions of their country; they cannot practice professions, they are kept purely as slaves for the breeding of children."[35]

In the "1880" section, the exclusion of women from institutional life is most obvious as a thematic concern: it leads to a situation in which, as Woolf writes in the second essay of *The Pargiters*, "They are young and healthy and have nothing to do but change the sheets at Whiteleys and peep behind the blinds at young men going to call next door" (28). But their exclusion, which the novel registers at the level of theme, feeds back into a formal structure: locked in the house all day, the Pargiter women are defined by family dynamics and petty domestic quarrels, rather than institutionally meaningful actions, practices, and behaviors:

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[35] This quote is taken from a draft manuscript of *The Pargiters* and cited in Grace Radin, *Virginia Woolf's* The Years (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1981), 69. Radin's book, a scrupulous recounting of Woolf's process of composition, is the only full-length work on *The Years*. It played a central role in the revival of the novel in the 1970s and 1980s and remains a critical touchstone. Radin discusses how Woolf altered initial drafts into the finished novel, focusing in particular on the excision of much material related to women's sexuality.

> [T]here was a rustling in the hall and in came Eleanor. It was much to their relief, especially to Milly's. Thank goodness, there's Eleanor she thought, looking up—the soother, the maker-up of quarrels, the buffer between her and the intensities and strifes of family life. . . . Protect me, she thought, handing her a teacup, who am such a mousy, downtrodden, inefficient little chit, compared with Delia, who always gets her way, while I'm always snubbed by Papa, who was grumpy for some reason. (14)

The three women are defined by their roles in a recurrent drama of familial discord: timid Milly; assertive "favorite" Delia; mediator Eleanor; all distributed around the central figure of the father. What are ostensibly Milly's thoughts are given sanction elsewhere by the narrator, but the distinctions drawn by domestic routine are erased and then restored by the proximity of the "social machine." "'I met old Burke at the Club,'" Abel says; "'asked me to bring one of you to dinner; Robin's back, on leave'. . . . Eleanor, sitting in her low chair, saw a curious look first on Milly's face, then on Delia's. She had an impression of hostility between them" (14-15).[36] Individual distinction is erased by Abel's "one of you," a phrase repeated in reference to the three women a page later. The women's distinctiveness is then restored by the "hostility" that their being lumped together generates in them: first Eleanor reappears, then Milly, then Delia. But their

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[36] As Lisa Weihman points out, in the novel's earlier drafts Woolf does not specify Robin Burke's profession, but makes clear in the published version that he is also a military man. Likewise, whereas in early drafts of *The Pargiters* the loss of the Colonel's fingers is attributed to a fictional incident "off . . . the Coromandel Coast" (13), in *The Years* it is tied specifically to a real historical event: the Mutiny. Weihman is correct to argue that, thematically, "such small editing choices expand the ideological implications of these details" and "reinforce the connections between sexual aggression and English militarism in the colonies," but they also reinforce the novel's formal logic, where character is tied to institutional history. See Weihman, "Virginia Woolf's Harum-Scarum Irish Wife," *Comparative Critical Studies* 4.1 (2007): 38-39.

father's address to them as an undifferentiable set has the odd effect of stripping them of the characteristics that had defined them earlier, as though, in a satirical reflection of the conditions of the time, being drawn closer to the social machine de-constitutes those forms of female character that actually manage to make themselves felt.

It is significant that the passage alights on Eleanor as its focusing consciousness. Eleanor is the closest thing to a protagonist that *The Years* offers, though only in terms of how often she appears; her viewpoint is not especially privileged, nor do the events of her life seem more significant than those of any other character's, and for these reasons critics of the novel have had trouble defining her function in the novel with any consistency. Particularly in the early sections, though, she often serves as a sort of relay point between the novel's formal strategies of characterization and the inclusion of those strategies' effects at the level of theme. Shortly after the three Pargiter girls' miniature drama of emergence and erasure in the tea scene, Eleanor reflects that "[s]he wished people would not say, 'Bring one of your daughters.' She wished they would say 'Bring Eleanor,' or 'Bring Milly,' or 'Bring Delia,' instead of lumping them all together. Then there could be no question" (17). And this relay-function is doubled when, in conversation with her brother Morris, Eleanor's awareness of her exclusion becomes the condition of Morris's elaboration. Entering the novel as "a sound in the hall" (31), Morris's presence is expanded through the mechanism of Eleanor's questioning:

> He wrinkled his forehead. He was losing his boyish look, Eleanor thought. That was the worst of the Bar, everyone said; one had to wait. He was devilling for Sanders Curry; and it was dreary work, hanging about the courts all day, waiting.

> "How's old Curry?" she asked—old Curry had a temper.
>
> "A bit liverish," said Morris grimly.
>
> "And what have you been doing all day?" she asked.
>
> "Nothing in particular," he replied.
>
> "Still Evans *v.* Carter?"
>
> "Yes," he said briefly.
>
> "And who's going to win?" she asked.
>
> "Carter, of course," he replied.
>
> Why "of course" she wanted to ask? But she had said something silly the other day—something that showed that she had not been attending. She muddled things up; for example, what was the difference between Common Law and the other kind of law? She said nothing. . . .
>
> "You'll be Lord Chancellor one of these days," she said. "I'm sure of it." He shook his head, smiling. . . . But even while she looked, a doubt came over him. Lord Chancellor, she had said. Ought she not to have said Lord Chief Justice? She never could remember which was which: and that was why he would not discuss Evans *v.* Carter with her. (31-32)

In an echo of Abel's eyes, "screwed up as though the glare of the East were in them," Morris's distinctive habit of wrinkling his forehead is tied to the Bar, and then to the practices associated with it: the "dreary work" of "hanging about the courts all day, waiting." Equally important, though, is that the passage registers Eleanor's nascent

consciousness of her own exclusion from the institutional world that constitutes Morris's being: lacking any formal education, she forgets, muddles, and as she does so becomes aware that a gap has opened between her and her brother—a gap that, although Woolf suggests that Victorian sexual ideology is its ultimate cause, is felt by Eleanor to be a product of Morris's access to the specialized knowledge of the legal profession: "When they met they never had time to talk as they used to talk—about things in general—they always talked about facts—little facts" (32).[37] Growing up, for Morris, involves a process of refinement that is takes him from "things in general" to "little facts"; a winnowing-away through school, university, and firm into a form of character, and a world, where his sister cannot follow.

This impression is deepened when Eleanor goes to the Law Courts with Morris's wife Celia to see him argue a case in the "1891" section, the novel's second. In what could be read as an ironic recognition of the hold institutions have over the construction of human character, she realizes that "the solemn sallow atmosphere forbade personalities," and she finds it difficult to pick him out in the "dark and crowded" space, where "men in wigs and gowns were getting up and sitting down and coming in and going out like a flock of birds settling here and there on a field" (102). Eleanor sees him, finally, and thinks "how odd he looked in his yellow wig"; but, of course, this is precisely the same yellow wig all the other barristers in the room wear, and a description that might be of Morris is also of the mass from which he emerges and into which he recedes: "They all looked like pictures, all the barristers looked emphatic, cut out, like eighteenth-century

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[37] Standard works on professionalization include Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1989); and Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977).

portraits hung upon a wall" (103). When he stands to speak, with "one hand on the edge of his gown," Eleanor thinks "how well she knew that gesture of Morris's . . . But she did not know that other gesture—the way he flung his arm out. That belonged to his public life, his life in the Courts" (104). Here again, Woolf situates formal character between idiosyncrasy and institution: "[flinging] his arm out . . . *belonged* to his public life, his life in the Courts." And in a sidelong affirmation of institutional durability, Sanders Curry, the lawyer for whom Morris had been devilling in "1880," is now the judge hearing the case. The machine keeps chugging along.

Despite these moments of irritation or resentment, Eleanor herself never develops the critical perspective that scenes like these offer the reader. She is an unreactive presence, as if the assumption of a more disruptive stance would jeopardize her role as the novel's relay point, registering the thematic and formal transactions of other characters, and as a unifying presence through many of the novel's temporally disparate sections. She involves herself with charitable work and a political committee (though we never see exactly what its politics are), travels to Spain and India, has a "belief in science" (312), and thinks, near the end of her life, "I do not want to go back into my past . . . I want the present" (318). At the same time, her niece Peggy imagines her, ambivalently, as a "portrait of a Victorian spinster" (316) who "believed with passion," even after the War, "in the things man had destroyed." Eleanor is part of "a wonderful generation . . . believers" (314), and the novel suggests that her "belief" is what enables her to maintain her mediatory structural position in the novel. "Belief" here stands for what Steve Ellis describes as a set of "Victorian" elements that Woolf's writing generally affirms (and affirms, Ellis argues, *as* distinctly Victorian): "romance, beauty, lyricism,

individuality, imagination"—what might be called a capacity for aesthetic experience.[38] Emerging from the Law Courts, "the uproar, the confusion, the space of the Strand came upon her with a shock of relief. She felt herself expand. . . . a rush, a stir, a turmoil of variegated life came racing towards her" (105). Eleanor's formal importance forces a reconsideration of primarily thematic readings like that of Kathy Phillips, for whom "Eleanor's only partially awakened consciousness" and "insensitiv[ity]" to issues of class and imperialism make her merely an object of critique in a novel that "unsparingly documents monotony and injustice."[39] With Eleanor's "belief" and its attendant virtues come a certain independence of perspective that, it is true, never makes the leap into critique, but this perspective is a thematic feature on which Eleanor's structural role depends.

As *The Years* progresses into the twentieth century, Woolf suggests that an independent perspective is all that remains of those virtues in a world grown less hospitable to "belief." While Peggy's initial reflection on "belief" is prompted by Eleanor's anger at a picture of "a fat man gesticulating" (313; probably Mussolini) in the evening paper, the terms in which Eleanor articulates that anger ("Damned— . . . Bully!" [313]) seem themselves to come from another time; while Peggy perceives that the sentiment is admirable, it also says little to an age, the 1930s, in which those "bullies" direct the fates of nations. Like the Teacher of Languages in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, Eleanor occupies a position from which events can be perceived but not influenced, and that position is marked as a Victorian holdover. But her consistent presence indexes the novel's historical trajectory, and in doing so counters Ellis's broader argument, that

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[38] Steve Ellis, *Virginia Woolf and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 121.
[39] Kathy Phillips, *Virginia Woolf against Empire* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1994), 37, 32, 28.

"distinctions and contrasts between the Victorian and the modern" do not "animate or structure [*The Years*] as they do the earlier novels" (119). Indeed, as Eleanor's niece Peggy and nephew North illustrate in the "Present Day" section, the question of how to represent historical change "without death or violence" in the relationship between character and institution is central to Woolf's project.

Still, monotony and injustice are important in the fates of the other Pargiter women, who, in positions less central to the novel's structure, tend to exemplify (again at both thematic and formal levels) the consequences of institutional exclusion. Minor female characters—particularly the sisters Rose, Delia, and Milly—develop forms of compensation that emerge early in the novel and have unpredictable, in some cases ironic, and deforming effects on the course of their lives. Young Rose, forced to go to the store alone while her brother Martin studies for an exam, imagines that she is "'Pargiter of Pargiter's Horse' . . . riding by night on a desperate mission to a besieged garrison" with "a secret message . . . to deliver to the General in person" (26). Rose will go on to become a suffragette, go to prison "for throwing a brick" (219), and finally be decorated for wartime service, though Martin puts it differently: "She smashed his window . . . and then she helped him to smash other people's windows" (399). Based less in a considered relation to the political (or institutional) world than in "a head full of her father's old stories of the Indian Mutiny" (*P*, 42), Rose's militancy is in some sense aimless (the "his" in Martin's assessment is never defined, seeming to stand for maleness in general) and premature. Delia, meanwhile, dreams of joining Charles Stewart Parnell's campaign for Irish home rule, but the unreal quality of her desire is emphasized by the erotic charge it assumes as she carefully constructs her fantasy:

> She could resist no longer.
>
> "Wearing a white flower in his button-hole," she began. It required a few minutes' preparation. There must be a hall; banks of palms; a floor beneath them crowded with people's heads. The charm was beginning to work. She became permeated with delicious starts of flattering and exciting emotion. She was the platform; there was a huge audience; everybody was shouting, waving handkerchiefs, hissing and whistling. Then she stood up. She rose all in white in the middle of the platform; Mr. Parnell was by her side. (21-22)

Lisa Weihman points out that Delia's "relationship with her father is so Oedipal as to constitute a parody of Freud," and argues that "in establishing Parnell as a rival to her father Woolf suggests that the Irish leader is a safe diversion for Delia's incestuous fantasies." In Weihman's reading, Delia is ultimately a "*faux* Irish nationalist"; her "romantic attachment to Parnell is sexual, not political, and her adolescent rebellion is grounded in her frustrated, unhealthy attachment to her father. . . . Woolf critiques nationalist politics in general as short-sighted, divisive, and particularly unhealthy for women".[40] But to read Delia's predicament as sexual rather than political overlooks the broader context of institutional exclusion, in which Delia's relationship to both the sexual *and* the political takes on an air of dream-like unreality. In "1891," Eleanor thinks to herself that Parnell's death with be "the end of all [Delia's] dreams" (107); later, after a forty-five year absence from the novel's plot, Delia reappears in "Present Day" to host

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[40] Weihman, 39-40, 40, 45.

the party that concludes the novel, and it is revealed that she has married not "a wild rebel" but Patrick, "the most King-respecting, Empire-admiring of country gentlemen," who, with his quiet fussiness, is forever "dash[ing] her dream[s]" (378). For women lacking access to the normative institutional structures that increasingly dominate the social world, refuge in fantasy becomes one form of (inadequate) compensation. This lends Delia herself an air of unreality, made literal in her near-total absence from the bulk of the novel.

Milly, the least distinctive of the Pargiter daughters, is described four times in "1880" as imitating the manner of a "grown-up" or "older person," and seems notable only for "always bring[ing] the conversation back to marriage" (30)—a consequence of "having nothing to do but . . . peep behind the blinds at young men." Her obsession with marriage, Woolf suggests, like Delia's obsession with a fantasy politics, is occasioned by a lack; but beyond their shared exclusion the two women are related by a set of interlocking ironies. While the attractive and assertive Delia's compensatory fantasies are ultimately associated with her dreamy insubstantiality and long periods of *absence* from the novel's plot, the obsequious Milly's obsession with marriage seems directly related to what eventually becomes an excessive physical *presence*. In the vignette that opens "1891" she is married and walks with "the swaying movement of a woman with child. There hung the yellow pears on the orchard wall, lifting the leaves over them, they were so swollen. But the wasps had got at them—the skin was broken" (85). That Milly, previously described as "mousy" and "downtrodden," should be associated with the fecund image of the swollen pears is at first surprising, and indeed, the harmonious

natural beauty that their alignment suggests immediately edges over into the "wasps" and "broken skin" of a rotten, overripe, raw nature.

Like Delia, Milly reappears in "Present Day," but now as an embodiment of the grotesque distension at which the passage from "1891" hints—a grotesquerie that Woolf directly associates with Milly's relationship to the conservative institutions of the gentry and traditional gender roles. She and her husband Hugh Gibbs "have several large estates" (357) where, her nephew North thinks, "the men shot, and . . . the women broke off into innumerable babies" (356). In her old age Milly is "voluminous in draperies proper to her sex and class. . . . In order to disguise her figure, veils with beads on them hung down over her arms. They were so fat that they reminded North of asparagus; pale asparagus tapering to a point. . . . He noticed how the rings were sunk in her fingers, as if the flesh had grown over them" (354). The way that Milly is actually overrun by the features that distinguish her, just as the flesh has grown over the diamonds on her fingers, reinforces the anxieties that underlie institutional characterization: she comes to embody the individual's apparent determination by the impersonal institutions in which the individual is formed. Likewise, Hugh appears first as "a vast bulk . . . chiefly white waistcoat, lined with black" (355); he is less a human being than an assemblage of the ornaments "proper to his sex and class." The entirety of North's conversation with Milly and Hugh (354-59) becomes phantasmagorical: from a mere waistcoat, Hugh becomes "an old elephant" (358); Milly has "unsheathed claws . . . fat little paws" (359); both are "amorphous bodies" with "long white tentacles" threatening to "suck [people] in." But these monstrosities sit side-by-side with a jarringly different set of images: as the couple discuss their children, North thinks, "this is the steam roller that smooths; obliterates;

rounds into identity; rolls into balls. . . . Jimmy was in Uganda" (359). The language here prefigures the "social machine" of *A Sketch of the Past* that "stamps and moulds" individuals, and marks its product (Jimmy) as not only institutional but, again, imperial. Yet this language sits intertwined with the imagery of raw nature; children are "property," but also "flesh and blood, which they would protect with the unsheathed claws of the primeval swamp" (359). There is no suggestion here that, as we might expect, the orderly procession of modern "civilised" institutions stands apart from, or conceals, the violence of the natural order. Rather, as with the unimaginable galloping carthorse of *A Sketch*, the message seems to be that no form of life can exist outside of a relation to the institutional world, whether that relation takes the form of inclusion or exclusion. The monstrosity of the Gibbses does not represent instinct reasserting itself in a sort of Freudian allegory of civilization's discontents (though it is tempting to read it this way); instead, it gestures yet again to the fundamentally formative and deformative effects of the regular functioning of institutions.

In his essay "Trollope and the Career," Nicholas Dames argues that "to say that desire, or ambition, is formed by the institutions and procedures that it is ordinarily supposed to precede is essentially to say that those desires are not particularly explosive or transformative."[41] The slippage in Dames's formulation of the problem—do "institutions and procedures" form "desire" in general, or just some "desires" among others?—allows for the possibility that desires formed outside of institutional life might on their own bear some transformative power. But Rose, Delia, and Milly's exclusion as women from the institutions of modern English life, in a world where life without a

[41] Nicholas Dames, "Trollope and the Career: Vocational Trajectories and the Management of Ambition," *Victorian Studies* 45 (2003): 256.

relation to those institutions has become "unimaginable," produces in them only various frustrated forms of fantasy and desire. Milly finally identifies so thoroughly with patriarchal tradition that she is figuratively swallowed by it, while Delia and Rose live the lives of what might be termed, to look again to *Three Guineas*, Premature Outsiders: outsiders without access to an inside that would lend relative meaning to their outsiderdom. Their relation to institutional life is a negative one, but a relation nonetheless; a thematic that is reflected at the level of form in the deformations that mark these women throughout the novel. Anxiety features prominently in their relationships to institutional life, and this anxiety is carried forward in the latter part of Woolf's career in *A Sketch* and *Between the Acts*. But *The Years* will go on to explore precisely how desires formed by institutional life might be transformative, as North and his sister Peggy respond implicitly to the question prompted by the Gibbses: "How then can we be civilised"? (359).

Sara Pargiter, cousin to Eleanor, Morris, and the other children of Abel Pargiter, takes this logic of institutional incorporation and exclusion to an extreme. Where the deformations of other excluded characters are primarily metaphorical, Sara is literally disfigured from the beginning: "She had been dropped when she was a baby; one shoulder was slightly higher than the other" (115). (Abel, despite his own missing fingers, is made "squeamish" by it.) It is as though Sara has begun life physically marked by "the machine into which [women's] rebellious bodies were inserted" (*S*, 152), as Woolf would write of herself in *A Sketch*. Sara's speech is repetitive and promiscuously allusive, and she often merely repeats what other characters have just said; she seems to be an alcoholic; and she is nasty and cynical is a seemingly unmotivated way. At an air-

raid-interrupted wartime dinner party in "1917," Sara denounces war and proposes a toast to "the New World!" (277), but her anti-militarist politics are bound up with personal anger at her cousin North: "'Coward; hypocrite, with your switch in your hand; and your cap on head—' He seemed to quote from a letter that she had written him" (305). Despite the ambiguity of Sara's presentation, she is central to the critical history of *The Years*. Politically-minded accounts of the novel have tended to read her as a truth-telling, if anarchic, feminist critic of the established order. DuPlessis calls her "a character whose visionary chants pose challenges to dominant ways of seeing"; Allison Booth sees her as "a kind of Antigone . . . a true radical"; Jane Marcus argues that she is a clear forerunner of *Three Guineas*' Outsiders.[42] Robert Caserio, in a more qualified assessment, sees Sara as incorporating a particularly modernist element of chance into the otherwise totalizing political and historical scheme of the novel; despite her difficulty, "the character suggests what Woolf thinks history and politics would best look like, what they might become. . . . the idea of an art that looks and sounds like Sara—parodic, wacky, annoyingly silly, and irrelevant—is shadowed forth as the hope of the political and historical world, even as it looks like its unworldly, unaccountable opponent."[43] Christine Froula's *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde* redirects attention from Sara to her precursor in the novel's drafts, Elvira. Tracing dairy entries that register the centrality of the Elvira/Sara character to Woolf's conception of her project, Froula illustrates (following Grace Radin) how the "prophet Elvira . . . a prophetic consciousness in a society riding a wave of change" (241) became, in the course of the novel's composition, the ineffectual,

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[42] DuPlessis, 172; Booth, 221; Marcus, *Languages of Patriarchy*, 64. See also Phillips 26-51; Comstock 273-74; and Patricia Cramer, "Loving in the War Years: The War of Images in *The Years*," in *Virginia Woolf and War*, ed. Mark Hussey (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1994), 203-24.
[43] Robert Caserio, *The Novel in England 1900-1950: History and Theory* (New York: Twayne, 1999), 79.

incoherent Sara. In doing so, however, Froula falls back on a persistent theme in critical accounts of *The Years*: what I would term the repressive hypothesis of Woolf scholarship. Froula's broad argument about the novel, an argument recapitulated in her reading of Elvira/Sara, is that Woolf initially imagined the "essay-novel" about "the sexual life of women" as a feminist foray into the public sphere; but as her notion of who she would be speaking for and to shifted, the frankly political "talking cure" that *The Pargiters* promised turned into the "enigmatic allegory" and "talking symptoms" of *The Years*.[44] Woolf, "seemingly helpless against repression" (250), could not bring herself to say what she set out wishing to say with Elvira, and so the finished novel is less interesting than the non-existent (as Froula admits) book about "the sexual life of women."[45] I engage at length here with Froula and others who have focused on Sara because the "problems" with Sara Pargiter need not be taken either as signs that the character herself occupies a space somehow external to the novel's genuine political and historical concerns, or as evidence of authorial repression and patriarchal victimization. Elvira may have been good polemic, but she was not good fiction, and not the figure Woolf ultimately settled on. Sara is less of a force thematically (that is, she is not a mouthpiece for a critical sensibility, as Elvira promised to be), but as both a troubled imaginary individual and a

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[44] Froula, 244.

[45] Stephen M. Barber also notes the critical tendency to base readings of *The Years* on a theory of authorial repression, arguing instead that the novel intentionally "stages a formal or textual practice that aspires both to diagnose fascism and to fight against a totalizing or unifying political, aesthetic, and moral system." Barber, "States of Emergency, States of Freedom: Woolf, History, and the Novel," *NOVEL* 42.2 (2009): 204. The origins of this critical tendency, and the related move that takes the published *Years* as less interesting than a potential text contained in the draft notebooks, are memorably critiqued by Gloria G. Fromm in her "Re-inscribing *The Years*: Virginia Woolf, Rose Macaulay, and the Critics," *Journal of Modern Literature* 13.1 (1986): 288-306. Fromm takes to task the contributors to the 1977 *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* volume on *The Years*; her own argument involves an assertion of Woolf's authorial agency and an idiosyncratic theory of influence that posits Rose Macaulay as a crucial influence on *The Years*.

formally difficult novelistic character, she embodies an outer limit to the novel's logic of institutional characterization.

In "1907," Sara (referred to in this scene by the diminutive "Sally") sits in her room, idly reading and waiting for her parents, Eugenie and Digby, and her sister Maggie to return from a party. (She has previously appeared only as a small child in "1891.") Though this scene, the only one in which we have access to Sara's thoughts, marks her real entry into the novel, it immediately takes the form of an exit; Sara, musing on scraps of Berkeley that she has read, thinks, "Nothing but thought, was it? . . . well, since it was impossible to read and impossible to sleep, she would let herself *be* thought. It was easier to act things than to think them. Legs, body, hands the whole of her must be laid out passively to take part in this universal process of thinking which the man said was the world living" (124). She finds that "it was impossible to act thought. She became something; a root, lying sunk in the earth; veins seemed to thread the cold mass; the tree put forth branches; the branches had leaves" (125). Failing to "become thought," she tries to read *Antigone*, until finally "a dark wing brushed her mind, leaving a pause, a blank space. . . . She was asleep" (128). Sara's naïve attempt to enact the philosophy she has just read is not, perhaps, meant to be taken entirely seriously; but it is telling that her very entrance into the novel is itself an attempt at self-erasure. When Maggie comes in and wakes her up, Sara tries to recount what she has read in an effort to keep her sister in the room, but ends up only repeating, "What's 'I'? . . . What's 'I'?" (131-32). Du Plessis suggests that this moment of feminine "communion" "intimate[s] that the fluid ego boundaries of the preoedipal bond are one source for the communal protagonist."[46]

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[46] Du Plessis, 167.

Certainly Sara's questioning the status of her own subjectivity immediately suggests a different mode of characterization from that at work in Abel and the other Pargiter men, who emerge so un-self-consciously from the collective practices of institutional life; but given her subsequent development (or lack thereof), it is not clear that *The Years* offers an entirely positive evaluation of Sara. "What's 'I'?" shadows Sara throughout the novel, and the question is neither resolved nor rendered irrelevant.

In "1910," after a drawn out and awkward lunch, Sara accompanies Rose to a political meeting; her account of it to her sister Maggie offers a representative sample of her speech:

> "And what did you do with Rose?" said Maggie. She spoke absent-mindedly. Sara turned and glanced at her. Then she began to play again. "Stood on the bridge and looked into the water," she murmured.
>
> "Stood on the bridge and looked into the water," she hummed, in time to the music. "Running water; flowing water. May my bones turn to coral; and fish light their lanthorns; fish light their green lanthorns in my eyes."
>
> (…)
>
> "You went out with Rose," she said. "Where to?"
>
> Sara left the piano and stood in front of the fireplace.
>
> "We got into a bus and went to Holborn," she said. "And we walked along a street," she went on; "and suddenly," she jerked

her hand out, “I felt a clap on my shoulder.” “Damned liar!” said Rose, “and took me and flung me against a public house wall!” Maggie stitched on in silence.

“You got into a bus and went to Holborn,” she repeated mechanically after a time. “And then?”

It is telling that Sara moves almost seamlessly from singing at the piano to speaking in the course of this exchange; she often strains against the novel’s realism, pulling toward a more lyrical, dreamlike, and allusive register (referring perhaps to *The Tempest*, for example, in the “may my bones turn to coral” passage). Her effect on language is thematized when North, reciting a poem to her later in the narrative, thinks, “The words going out into the room seemed like actual presences, hard and independent; yet as she was listening they were changed by their contact with her” (322). If this were all, if Sara simply lived in closer contact with aesthetic experience than her fellow Pargiters, she could be made sense of as a critic of dominant ways of seeing, as bearer of a distinctly feminine truth, or even as the “artist” figure in the only Woolf novel that lacks one. But as her story about her day with Rose continues, it becomes difficult to decipher which parts are entirely made up, which are exaggerated or distorted (and to what effect), and which are merely given a poetic twist. The lack of free indirect access to Sara means that we do not know what her attitude is, and our confusion is amplified by the fact that other characters—here, Maggie—are never presented to us as though *they* know, either; the odd understatement of Maggie’s eventual conclusion that “there was something wrong with the story; something impossible” seems as misaligned with Sara’s bizarre tale as the tale is with the ordinary prose of the novel. So, not only can we not tell what Sara should

mean to *us*, we cannot tell what she means to other individuals *in the novel*. She is close to completely unconstrained in her speech, but the absence of constraint, predicated on her allergy to any form of institutional integration, does not register in the novel as freedom; rather, in an almost perfect negative example of institutional characterization, the absence of constraint is simply the absence of meaning. The formation of character comes to appear impossible in the absence of the institution.

Moreover, Sara actively refuses the forms of integration that generate coherence in other characters. In one of the most puzzling scenes in "Present Day," North, having recently returned to London after a long career in the military and running a ranch in Africa, sits with Sara in her room. To kill time before the party they plan to attend, North begins to recite Andrew Marvell's "The Garden," but he is interrupted by a noise in the hall. "'The Jew,' she murmured. . . . 'The Jew having a bath'" (322). Sara recounts how Abrahamson, the Jew with whom she shares the communal bathroom, works in a tallow factory and leaves a "line of grease" around the bathtub, the thought of which makes North "physically sick" (323). Sara says that she too has found it disgusting, and tells a story about how, when she first found the grease in the tub, she was driven to seek proper employment as a means of escape:

> "I put on my hat and coat and rushed out in a rage. . . . And there were people passing. . . . And I said, "Must I join your conspiracy? Stain the hand, the unstained hand,"—he could see her hand gleam as she waved it in the half-light of the sitting room, "—and sign on, and serve a master; all because of a Jew in my bath, all because of a Jew?" (323)

North repeatedly interrupts her lyrical recitation to request clarification, and she trails off remembering her words to the editor who interviews her for a job: "The Jew's in my bath, I said—the Jew . . . the Jew. . . ." (324) As in the long passage quoted above, neither we nor the other characters can be sure how to take Sara's tale; since she still lives in the boardinghouse with Abrahamson, it seems that she did not take the job at the newspaper. "How much of that was true?" North asks, but she doesn't reply, and the scene shifts to Delia's party.

Sara's antisemitism foregrounds the problems inherent in the notion that her characterization is motivated by critique. In a fascinating essay, Maren Linett has traced the history of this passage's composition and the critical response to it.[47] Linett points out that critics, generally starting from the assumption that, at least by the 1930s and twenty years of marriage to Leonard, Woolf was not antisemitic in any meaningful sense, have generally excused the antisemitic tone of the passage by arguing one of two things: first, that Sara's perspective is ironized and critiqued by Woolf; or second, that Sara's remaining in the flat despite her declared prejudice is intentional, a gesture of solidarity with workers and the excluded. Through an analysis of Woolf's letters and the drafts of this scene, Linett argues that *The Years* "makes of a specific reaction to a Jew . . . an abstracted collection of meanings supple enough to support the weight of multiple social and aesthetic concerns" (344). In the figure of the working-class Jew, according to Linett, Woolf confused the victims of political oppression with the oppressors, and thus the Jew first threatens Sara's autonomy and then becomes an index by which to judge her own independence: driven to seek employment by Abrahamson's presence, she ultimately will

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[47] Maren Linett, "The Jew in the Bath: Imperiled Imagination in Woolf's *The Years*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 48 (2002): 341-361.

not "stain the hand," and so the only thing stronger than her dislike of the Jew is her drive for imaginative autonomy. Thus a complicated but persistent antisemitism exists side-by-side in Woolf's novel with a radical emphasis on the need for women to establish and maintain their autonomy (explored further, Linett argues, in *Three Guineas*). Linett's broad point about Woolf's antisemitism is convincing and troubling, but there are two difficulties with her reading of *The Years* specifically. One involves the fact that, even if Woolf is not critical of Sara's attitudes in this scene, Sara is established as a less-than-valorized character for *other* reasons throughout the novel, as shown above. This leads directly into the second point, which is that Linett proceeds from the assumption that Woolf's concept of female creative autonomy is absolute, rather than predicated on access to the professions and to the institutions of modernity. Again, there are no Outsiders without an inside, and in this sense Sara does not look forward in any constructive way to *Three Guineas*. Whatever the ideological implications of her character's attitude toward Abrahamson, her fissiparousness, her failure to cohere, resonates more broadly at the level of form. Sara is not even a full-fledged character in the sense that Woolf proposes in "Character in Fiction": in herself, she can reveal little of the "whole society" because she does not participate in it; she embodies the absence of the social, institutional aspects of character (substituting for rule-boundedness, habit, and meaningful action her talent for mimickry). North's question after her rambling account of her day is the only thing that can really be said of her: "How much of that was true?"

Finally, the novel's mode of characterization takes a turn in "Present Day," its final section, where Woolf attempts to "shift the stress from present to future." This turn is apparent in the youngest generation of Pargiters, North and Peggy, nephew and niece

of many Pargiter siblings discussed above. They offer a good deal of perspective on the novel's other characters, if only because the longest section is largely given over to them, with Eleanor playing a secondary role. But unlike Eleanor, whose perspective takes up the bulk of earlier sections as Peggy's and North's do here, the two siblings are more than mediatory figures; in a more substantial way, they are the vehicles through which Woolf attempts to assimilate into the novel a fully institutionalized social world in which forms of freedom and change might nonetheless be possible.

Like Sara, Peggy appears first as a young girl in "1911"; when she appears again, in "Present Day," she happens to be thinking of Sara: "Sally sitting on the edge of a chair with a smudge on her face. What a fool, she thought bitterly, and a thrill ran down her thigh. Why was she bitter? For she prided herself upon being honest—she was a doctor—and that thrill she knew meant bitterness" (310). The aside "she was a doctor" suddenly brings Peggy into focus, and the habits of thought and perception that define her in this last section of the novel are directly linked to that institutional role, itself the product of a particular education and specialized knowledge of the body. Because she is "a doctor," here, Peggy knows that the "thrill" means "bitterness." The precise logic of this link aside, such moments of embodied feeling occur over and over in the episode. Told that her former teacher has praised her, "There, said Peggy, that's pleasure. The nerve down her spine seemed to tingle…[e]ach emotion touched a different nerve. A sneer rasped the thigh; pleasure thrilled the spine; and also affected the sight" (344). Perhaps most strikingly in a novel more notable for its oddly subdued tone and ambiguity of affect than for its moments of passion, Peggy is reconciled to her brother North, to whom she has

been consciously cruel at an earlier moment in the party, through a moment of unspoken exaltation brought on by physical contact:

> Her hand was still on his arm; she felt something hard and taut beneath the sleeve, and the touch of his flesh, bringing back to her the nearness of human beings and their distance, so that if one meant to help one hurt, yet they depended on each other, produced in her such a tumult of sensation that she could scarcely keep herself from crying out, North! North! North! (377)

Peggy's institutional formation feeds back into her personal relationships; at each moment of embodied feeling she is able to "examine it," leading to moments of critical appraisal of herself and others—a capacity that other characters in the novel lack. And she is relatively untroubled by questions of her independent subjectivity: in contrast to Sara's "What's 'I'?", Peggy says, "I'm a doctor" (343). What we might call a self-conscious sense of self would seem to be significant here; through it Peggy moves away from what Hermione Lee calls the rest of the novel's "case histories . . . forms of frustrated and indecisive behavior" that "are products of a political system."[48]

And yet the promise of her contact with North is an exception, for Peggy's examinations of her feelings towards others usually serve only to deepen her cynical and resentful attitude. Her embodiment of the protocols of the medical profession becomes a social prop, ill-suiting her to the situations in which she finds herself: miserable at the party, she thinks, "What is the tip for this particular situation? . . . as if she were prescribing for a patient. Take notes, she added. Do them up in a bottle with a glossy

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[48] Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 623.

green cover, she thought. Take notes and the pain goes. Take notes and the pain goes, she repeated to herself" (333). The attempt to apply the procedures of institutional life to a situation in which those procedures do not apply echoes Abel at the dinner table in 1880, wishing to "give some order"; the catechistic repetition of "take notes and the pain goes" suggests the danger of over-identification with one's role, which in turn evokes the tension between the individual character and the anonymous type. The awareness of the body that her education grants her threatens to define her; her "examinations" repeatedly reinforce the truth of the body's "spontaneous feelings." An obnoxious young man, she thinks, "can't help it, not with that nerve-drawn egotist's face" (342), which seems to get the relation between affect and body exactly backwards, as though for Peggy the testimony of the body determines the possibilities for human personality. Talking to an elderly uncle, she thinks:

> Rest—rest—let me rest. How to deaden; how to cease to feel; that was the cry of the woman bearing children; to rest, to cease to be. In the Middle Ages, she thought, it was the cell; the monastery; now it's the laboratory; the professions; not to live; not to feel[.] (336-37)

Here, Peggy's evocation of "the laboratory" recalls Chloe and Olivia, the fictional scientists in *A Room of One's Own* who Woolf had imagined might mark the first tentative stirrings of women's independent creative consciousness. Peggy, too, is "brilliant" (344), but she is decidedly not those women. The narrator of *A Room* picks up "*Life's Adventure*, or some such title, by Mary Carmichael," and learns specifically that Chloe and Olivia share a laboratory, "like each other," and "were engaged in mincing

liver, which is, it seems, a cure for pernicious anaemia."[49] By contrast with this scene of cheerful industry, Peggy is solitary and deeply unhappy, and we see nothing of her professional life. She tends to be critical of if not cynical about her profession and the people around her. Where Woolf imagines Olivia leaving the laboratory after a day's work to return to her children and family—a woman who has it all—here Peggy evokes the religion of the Middle Ages alongside modern science and business not to rehearse a feminist narrative of progress from the stifling cloister to the fresh air of educated professionalism but to draw an equivalence between institutions old and new, setting both in opposition to authentic bodily experience, the "liv[ing]" and "feel[ing]" that comes with "bearing children."

The "let me rest" passage turns on its head the liberal feminist critique that Woolf herself had long advocated, which, as Berman and Froula have both argued, involved a complex negotiation between restrictive embodiment and creative transcendence.[50] And unlike many of the more progressive or idealistic sentiments expressed in the novel, Peggy's critique of institutional life is not directly called into question; rather, the intensity and apparent truth-value of her own embodied experiences seem to affirm it. The passages are of obvious, perhaps predictable, critical interest: Why does the only professional woman in Woolf's fiction resent her profession? What does Peggy's complaint tell us about the place of the body in Woolf's feminism? How might her strangely erotic interactions with her father and brother be read against the backdrop of Woolf's own experiences of incest?[51] These issues are not without significance, and *The*

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[49] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 80, 83.
[50] See Froula, 189-98; and Berman, 114-156.
[51] See Froula, 251-256.

Years has typically been read in these thematic, historical, or biographical terms when it is read at all. But to stop there is to miss what is most significant about Peggy's place in the novel. If character is understood as merely individual, she is one more unhappy woman, as bitter perhaps as Sara and without the questionable consolations of marriage and family available to other Pargiter women. She seems to bear the full force of Woolf's observation in *Three Guineas* that "it seems as if there were no progress in the human race, but only repetition" (80). But if character is understood as essentially social and institutional, it is clear that Peggy's dissatisfaction is qualitatively different from that of other figures in the novel; the repetition is repetition with a difference. The habits, practices, and distinctive qualities that comprise Peggy as a character are generated not by her exclusion from modern institutional life but by her inclusion in it; as a character she emerges from the tension between incorporation and individuation.[52] She is both "a doctor" and the "exception," the "peculiar person," but her critical detachment reflects on this formal mechanism in a way that other characters do not. This signal feature of the novel's modernity—the inclusion of women in modern institutions—is felt less in *The Years*' thematic concerns than in its formal structures of characterization, which are only intermittently dramatized within the plot.

Woolf suggests that Peggy's position in the novel is both cause and effect of a historical shift. As James Naremore points out, the year 1919, when the professions were opened to women by the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, is of crucial importance in *Three Guineas* but is excluded from *The Years*: it stands for "an unstated boundary

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[52] The issue of deviation from institutional norms was a going concern in sociology at this time. See, for example, Robert K. Merton's "Social Structure and Anomie," *American Sociological Review* 3.5 (1938): 672-682, in which Merton "suggest[s] that certain phases of social structure generate the circumstances in which infringement of social codes constitutes a 'normal' response" (672).

between old and new."[53] This historical moment is not represented in the novel but is incorporated by the very fact of Peggy's being a professional woman. Peggy's moments of critical detachment issue from within an institutional formation, suggesting that she too is subject to the "split" within herself of which Woolf wrote in *A Sketch*, the "split" that grows from "perceptions, however slight and transient" that "gave [Woolf's] attitude . . . a queer twist." Noting that "she was daily impressed by the ignorance of doctors" (312), Peggy beings to move beyond her professional cynicism and toward an explicit awareness of the limits of the medical institution of which she is a part. But explicit, constructive critique is not really the point here. Institutionally formed and bearing a critical sensibility (however slight and transient) that is not external to but predicated upon that institutional formation, Peggy instantiates the conditions of possibility for genuine institutional and social change.[54]

In *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach argues that "the serious realism of modern times cannot represent man otherwise than as embedded in a total reality, political, social, and economic, which is concrete and constantly evolving."[55] *The Years* partakes of this serious realism by encoding modern institutions into character, creating imagined individuals who incorporate into the form of the novel social phenomena that *exceed* the individual while remaining unnarratable except *through* the individual. Institutions

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[53] James Naremore, "Nature and History in *The Years*," in *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity*, ed. Ralph Freedman (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980), 75. See also Woolf, *Three Guineas,* 9.
[54] Barber similarly suggests that *The Years* and *Three Guineas* propose "a relation of combination between the internal and the external . . . the public and private . . . maing of oneself one of those heterogeneous elements whose relation to the whole renders that whole—in *Three Guineas*, the state—*variable*" (205). Barber's interesting argument begins with a focus on Woolf's interest in ethical and spiritual work on the self, moving to show how Woolf related that ethical work to "the state"—a term which, my argument should suggest, is not sufficient to capture the varied set of institutions with which Woolf engages in these texts.
[55] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis,* trans. Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), 463.

"stamp" and "mould" characters who embody those institutions in a process of simultaneous individuation and incorporation, the generative tension between character and type. But it also extends this formal process to the supra-national institutions of empire, making them positive presences in the narrative via their central role in the formation of character. Thus Woolf's realism presses against Fredric Jameson's well-known and much-disputed axiom that, in an imperial world, the formal and stylistic innovations of modernism compensate for literature's inability to grasp the totality of a system that is no longer national but global.[56] North Pargiter, who departs for the War after being mocked by Sara for his militarism, returns in "Present Day" as (significantly) an "outsider" (301, 306, 383) to what he sees as a world where people can only talk of "money and politics" (301). Like Abel in the beginning of the novel, North is "built" from traits acquired in the institutions of imperial governance and commerce; after leaving the Army he has spent a number of years running an isolated farm in Africa. ("'And you, sir?' said the maid to North . . . 'Captain Pargiter,' said North, touching his tie" [345].) Other characters refer to North repeatedly as a "farmer." Meeting his uncle Edward, now an Oxford don, he wryly observes, "Edward, the scholar, paid tribute to North, the soldier" (385); he thinks of his uncle as "stamped." But his twenty-five years on the periphery of Empire have put him out of step with the metropolitan center. The novel dramatizes his vertiginous shift at the level of perception, in moments of almost Conradian "delayed decoding," ironically set in a central London that North thinks of as "the heart of darkness" (390):

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[56] See Fredric Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism," in *The Modernist Papers* (New York: Verso, 2007), 152-169.

> But the cars behind him hooted persistently; they hooted and hooted. What at? he asked. Suddenly he realized that they were hooting at him. The light had changed; it was green now, he had been blocking the way. He started off with a violent jerk. He had not mastered the art of driving in London. (292)

North is incapable of the "metropolitan perception" that Raymond Williams calls a precondition for the emergence of modernism. He finds himself falling back on his "stock phrase" (380), "money and politics," and the novel consistently relates this failure of perception back to "Africa," a word that, in relation to North, stands not just for the continent but for a whole complex of formative institutional experience.

But that experience, and the too-slow habits of thought and perception that it has bestowed on North, becomes the basis for a habit of questioning that, like Peggy's, may be only fleeting but that becomes the basis for an inchoate critical sensibility.[57] In particular, North insistently relates individual conduct to its institutional context. Listening to young men debate politics, he thinks, "That's Oxford, that's Harrow . . . recognising the tricks of speech that were taught at school and college." And he examines

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[57] John Whittier-Ferguson suggests that North and Peggy, as members of the novel's youngest generation, do not "feel at home in language" and "lament their alienation from words." Whitter-Ferguson, "Repetition, Remembering, Repetition: Virginia Woolf's Late Fiction and the Return of War," *Modern Fiction Studies* 57 (2011): 244. In this they exemplify the condition of Woolf's late work, which, in the face of another world war, turns away from the modernist imperative to create language anew and toward an attention to the everyday, commonplace and repetitive use of language. Language, though debased by war, remains the only stay against violence. Whitter-Ferguson's argument is compelling, and follows my own in noting that North and Peggy turn the novel toward the future, but it overlooks the ways that the novel's clichés, repetitions, and habits of speech are often institutionally conditioned and disseminated, especially in Peggy's case, and thus refer back to the language of specific institutions rather than language as such. Randi Saloman, in *Virginia Woolf's Essayism*, links *The Years*' reliance on repetition and linguistic confusion to Woolf's attempt to combine the essay and novel in her late-career writing. Failed communication in *The Years*, for Salomon, is an expression of Woolf's awareness, as an essayist, of the need to abnegate the authority and control over language that are the novelist's stock-in-trade. See Salomon, *Virginia Woolf's Essayism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2012), 138-168.

the normative basis for his own criticisms: "At their age, he thought, he had been in the trenches, he had seen men killed. But was that a good education? At their age, he thought, he had been alone on a farm sixty miles from the nearest white man, in control of a herd of sheep. But was that a good education?" (383). The passage ends with him thinking, of the Oxford and Harrow men, "If they want to reform the world . . . why not begin there, at the centre, with themselves?" (384). The sentiment could be taken as evasive, as displacing the issue of historical and institutional change onto personal behavior. But a more substantial reading would account for the fact that the novel's entire mode of characterization has worked up to this point to reveal the institutional and the individual as implicated in each other, and note that North, whatever his perspectival limits ("Damn the Jew!" he says to Sara; elsewhere he thinks, "Damn women . . . curse their little inquisitive minds" [375]), identifies this implication as the central issue. In a complex and image-laden passage, North effectively comments on the question of how the collective practices, habits, and rules of the institution could be constitutive of individual character:

> Not halls and reverberating megaphones; not marching in step after leaders, in herds, groups, societies caparisoned. No; to begin inwardly, and let the devil take the outer form. . . . Not black shirts, green shirts, red shirts—always posing in the public eye; that's all poppy-cock. Why not down barriers and simplify? But a world, he thought, that was all one jelly, one mass, would be a rice pudding world, a white counterpane world. To keep the emblems and tokens of North Pargiter . . . but at the same time spread out, make

> a new ripple in human consciousness, be the bubble and the stream, the stream and the bubble—myself and the world together—he raised his glass. Anonymously, he said, looking at the yellow liquid. But what do I mean, he wondered—I, to whom ceremonies are suspect, and religion's dead; who don't fit, as the man said, don't fit in anywhere? He paused. There was a glass in his hand; in his mind a sentence. And he wanted to make other sentences. But how can I, he thought . . . unless I know what's solid, what's true; in my life, in other people's lives? (389)

North's speculations speak to the central problem of the fully institutionalized social world to which Woolf addressed *The Years*, but it also speaks to the means by which that problem is addressed in the form of the novel. What starts out as a paean to individualism is qualified and finally questioned as North works it through; rather than proposing an answer the passage ends up presenting his awareness of dwelling within an irresolvable tension. The uninterrupted functioning of a complex of institutions, for North as for Peggy, ends up producing a mis-fit that is in part historically determined (by the conditions of late empire, embodied in the figure of the returned colonial administrator) and partly contingent; while less than ideal, it comes to look like the necessary if not sufficient grounds for the development of a new relationship between the individual and the institutional whole. The "story" of *The Years*, it could be said, lies not in its haphazard accumulation of events across fifty-odd years, but rather in the tale it tells of character itself. Peggy's and North's reflections on the circumstances of their institutional

lives in the "present day" of *The Years* might also be seen as reflections on the relationship between the concepts of character and institution.

Woolf's deployment of institutional character in *The Years* partakes of a sort of consubstantiality, in which the individual and the society (understood in *The Years* as the totality of sub- and supranational institutions) emerge together. The aim of her formal innovations in *The Years*, though—indeed in all her novels—was aesthetic, not political, and, as she repeatedly argues in her essays, what makes the novel form distinctive is its ability to facilitate the creation of character. Yet *The Years* also stands alone among Woolf's late oeuvre in its embrace of institutional character. Of *The Waves*, her most avowedly "poetic" novel, she wrote in her diary that she had attempted to create "no characters," and in that novel the effects of the world's "invisible presences" on individual lives are evoked primarily in psychological rather than social terms. In the autobiographical fragments of *A Sketch*, the previously dynamic relationship between individual and institution will come to seem static and deadening as the type comes to simply to stand for the institution. Woolf began to view the institutional realm as essentially oppressive, and would turn in *Between the Acts* to questions of culture, the nation, and more mystical forms of interpersonal connection and collective being. But of *The Years* she wrote, "Its different from the others of course: has I think more 'real' life in it; more blood & bone."[58] That "real life" was one in which the shared rules, practices, routines and habits of institutions, in a world where "life" outside those institutions had become unimaginable, might foster and lend meaning to individual lives rather than

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[58] Woolf, *Diaries*, 5:38.

suppressing them. At the same time, that life necessitated a realist modernism, in which character, far from being surpassed, was reinvented for the institutional world.

Chapter 3: "Shadows in the Obscure Background": Mulk Raj Anand and the Politics of Institutional Form

The previous chapters have traced a path from Conrad's protracted and pessimistic mid-career examination of the "inhuman" institutions of high imperialism to Woolf's search for forms of institutional incorporation that might foster collective change in the low, dishonest decade of the Thirties. The divergent political positions of these writers are united by a common deployment of institutional character as a means to carry forward the classical realist novel's aspiration to capture totality, bringing that aspiration into an imperial world structured by supra- and sub-national institutions. In drawing together texts like *The Inheritors* and *The Pargiters*, and *Nostromo* and *The Years*, I have suggested that Anglophone modernism was more deeply committed to realism and representation than has been previously noted. In this chapter, I trace that commitment through the early career of the Anglophone Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand. Anand's novel *Coolie* (1936) exemplifies the literary uptake of institutional life in a global and late-imperial context, developing institutional character as a formal complement to the novel's far-ranging thematic critique of Indian society under British rule. Rejecting tradition and the domestic as stays against the depredations of imperial capitalism, *Coolie* turns back to the concept of the modern institution for limited and closely circumscribed forms of accountability and fairness—a pattern of institutional thinking that, I suggest, unites much of Anand's early writing, from his novels to his wartime political essays. *Coolie* is highly attentive to the tension between what George Lukács calls the novel's "biographical form" and the extended timescape of institutions, particularly in what

Anand calls the "laws of political economy," mills, banks, unions, and public health services; and it exemplifies the global reach of a modernism that sought to give positive representation to the structures and effects of global empire. The novel is a hinge point in the important early career of a still-under-appreciated modernist and colonial intellectual, and it illuminates ways that seemingly familiar novelistic tropes were reconstructed as means of rendering in aesthetic form the action of institutions.

Anand was distinctly aware of the intertwining of opportunity and constraint in the public and private institutions of the late British Empire, in India and in the metropole. He was born in 1905 in Peshawar, now in Pakistan, then a military and administrative center of British India. Though Anand's family was broadly upper-caste Hindu, his mother's background was in the peasantry, while his educated father pursued a secular career in the British-Indian Army alongside an evolving set of casual religious interests: "Side by side with the Hinduism into which he was born," Anand writes, he maintained "a family devotion to the peculiar Ismaili religion," the sect of Shia Islam headed by the Aga Khan, and he eventually joined the Arya Samaj, a reformist Hindu movement with nationalist sympathies.[1] As Anand recounts, though, his father's ultimate allegiance was to the institution that provided him with a career: "the Army code seemed to have become his Bible," Anand writes, and thus his father was not "troubled by the necessity to discover a way of life" (32). That career would help produce Anand's own sense of displacement within India, bringing the family to live in a predominantly Sikh and Muslim region. Anand distinguished himself at university by his precocious erudition in English, Persian and Urdu, and his imprisonment for breaking curfew after the

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[1] Mulk Raj Anand, *Apology for Heroism* [1945], 3rd ed. (New Delhi: Arnold-Heineman, 1975), 30.

Amritsar massacre of 1919 catalyzed his anti-colonial politics. He would be arrested again before moving to England to pursue a doctorate in philosophy at the University of London, just in time for the General Strike of 1926, when he saw that, as he put it, "the people of Britain, no less than the people of India, had yet to win their liberty" (62). He remained in England off and on for another twenty years, associating with E. M. Forster, T. S. Eliot, and the Woolfs, though his radical politics would lead him to sympathy with the Communist Party and to the Spanish Civil War. In Spain he met George Orwell, with whom he would broadcast extensively for the BBC. His commitment to Indian independence from Britain, even in the face of European Fascism, alienated a number of British leftist comrades. (Anand's *Letters on India*, published in the midst of World War II, demanded immediate independence for India; Leonard Woolf, in the introduction he was asked to write for the volume, declared, "Even if I wanted to—which I do not—I would not dare to pat you or any other member of the Indian Congress Party on the back.")[2] Returning to India for good just before Independence, he founded *Marg*, a journal of architecture and design, which he edited for decades and which is still published today, and was instrumental in bringing Le Corbusier to undertake part of the design of Chandigarh, the capital city of Punjab and Haryana. From his home in Bombay, he wrote extensively in several languages, taught at Indian universities, and throughout his career promoted a democratic, socialist, Indian modernism that he termed simply "humanism" in both art and politics. He died in 2004, just shy of his one-hundredth birthday, and though no biography or authoritative bibliography yet exists, he left behind

[2] Quoted in Kristen Blumel, *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 92.

at best count eighteen novels, numerous short stories, several plays, and innumerable essays.[3]

Anand's biography is significant here for two reasons. Taken as a whole, his long career is also a version of Anglophone modernism's own career in the twentieth century, tracing across the decades the combinations of aesthetic experiment, public culture, and political commitment that originated with global avant-gardes, were disseminated through colonial education systems, and both inspired and threatened postcolonial literary ventures. Anand was, as Simon Gikandi writes, a writer "whose political or cultural projects were enabled by modernism even when the ideologies of the latter . . . were at odds with decolonization."[4] But more specifically, the outline of Anand's early life, by his own account, highlights one of the signal tensions that would structure the modernist realism of his early novels. "Hinduism," he wrote, "has been breaking up even in its caste aspect, through the coming of modern industry and the social and political ideas and institutions associated with it. So I grew up in a hotch-potch world of which I early began to perceive the inconsistencies" (*Apology* 29). In his mother's "pantheism," "vague and untrustworthy" (30), and her unquestioning adherence to ritual, he felt that he had seen the stifling effects of traditional practices, which he largely rejected as a resource for meaningful resistance to British rule. Through his father's negation of those traditions, "through efficient service" (34) to the military, he perceived a secular alternative mode of social organization—the modern institutions of the Empire—whose potential for systemic harm would nonetheless become to him increasingly clear, and which, for those

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[3] I base much of this outline of Anand's career on Jessica Berman's in her "Comparative Colonialisms: Joyce, Anand, and the Question of Engagement," *Modernism/modernity* 13 (2006): 467-68; and on Anand's own account in *Apology for Heroism*.
[4] Simon Gikandi, "Modernism in the World," *Modernism/modernity* 13 (2006): 420.

incorporated into it, offered but one "ideal" as "a gift from the benign Sarkar—to pass all examinations and to secure a good subordinate job in the pay of the government" (36). The broad opposition that his parents' lives figured for Anand, between the institutions of tradition and the institutions of rule, is reflected in the complexity of the social world of his early novels, especially *Coolie*; and the novel's experiments with character arise from the need to capture the totality of that world, in "the muddle created by the impact of Europe" (36).

First published in England in 1936 and banned in India until Independence, *Coolie* was Anand's second novel. While his first, *Untouchable*, follows the events of a single day in the life of its introspective titular hero, *Coolie*'s plot expands both temporally and spatially, covering many months and thousands of miles in the life of its adolescent protagonist Munoo. The novel is a sort of tragic picaresque. Munoo, an orphan, is taken from his village in northern India by his uncle, a minor official at the Imperial Bank of India, to work as a servant in the home of a bank higher-up in the town of Sham Nagar. Beaten until he runs away, he flees by train to the small city of Daulatpur, where he finds work in a "pickle-making and essence-brewing factory" until its kind-hearted proprietor Prabha is swindled by his business partner and forced to shut down.[5] Next, Munoo finds work doing odd jobs and hauling bags of grain, helping to support Prabha and his wife until they leave town. Taking to the rails again with a traveling circus, Munoo arrives in Bombay, finding work at a textile mill and befriending a poor worker, Hari, and his family. The novel's most complicated plot developments take place here: Munoo looks on as the leaders of a militant union outmaneuver their

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[5] Anand, *Coolie* (Delhi: Penguin, 1993), 63

accommodationist rivals and call a strike that quickly runs aground on religious discord. In one of the more contingent plot turns in the novel, Munoo is struck by a car while fleeing the resulting riots. Inside is an emancipated Anglo-Indian woman, Mrs. Mainwaring, who takes him with her to British hill station of Simla, where he becomes her servant and rickshaw-puller, contracts tuberculosis, and dies in the novel's last line.

As this summary suggests, *Coolie*'s plot links a relentless indictment of Indian society under British rule to the brief, difficult life of its central character, whose travels provide the narrative with occasions to observe the social spectrum of late-colonial India, and whose sufferings lend the novel its moral thrust. But *Coolie* leavens its critique with a pervasive sociological interest in everyday Indian life. At times this interest takes the form of didactic narration—"The usual length of the Simla rickshaw is nine feet, including the shaft, and the breadth is four feet. The weight is normally 260 to 360 lb" (262)—issuing from what Leela Gandhi, somewhat less than enthusiastically, calls Anand's "unflagging love of detail."[6] But this love of detail is equally embodied in the novel's drive to transpose the rhythms and vocabulary of the subcontinent's many regional languages into English prose—especially in bouts of elaborate cursing. Having gotten carried away playing with his employer's daughter in the house where he serves, Munoo is subjected to a tirade from Bibiji, the girl's mother:

> "I was only playing, Bibiji," said Munoo, anticipating a storm and seeking in vain to avert it.
>
> "Vay, you eater of your masters! May you die! May the vessel of your life never float in the sea of existence!" the tornado

[6] Leela Gandhi, "Novelists of the 1930s and 1940s," in *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2003), 178.

> of abuse burst. "May you never rest in peace, neither you, nor your antecedents! That you should attack the honor of my child! Only a little child, too! You lustful young bull from the hills! . . . No respect! You spoiler of my salt! . . . How did we know we were taking on a snake in our house, who would turn treacherous after we had fed him with milk!" (57)

In *Coolie*, these transpositions are frequently deployed in attempts at comic relief, though in other texts—as in his 1941 novel about a company of Indian soldiers in World War I France, *Across the Black Waters*—Anand puts these seemingly awkward translations to powerful effect: characters' modulations into and out of regional languages are rendered entirely in English but with subtle shifts of tone and affect. Of course, this technique is also a product of Anand's desire to present the languages of a colonized society for an Anglophone metropolitan audience; *Coolie* suggests the political awkwardness this practice—or, perhaps, tries to blunt that awkwardness—by staging moments of Munoo's own incomprehension of other regional languages within the diegesis, as when he arrives in Bombay and gazes at "the hieroglyphics of a language curious to him" (151), perhaps Marathi.[7]

These two features—focalization through the youthful protagonist and a special attention to language as a site of authority and experiment—have been the focus of compelling recent accounts of Anand's early career, by Jessica Berman and Benjamin

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[7] Anand's experiments with Anglicized dialogue influenced writers whose work has received far more attention than his own. As Salman Rushdie pointed out some thirty years ago: "English is an Indian literary language, and by now, thanks to writers like [Rabindranath] Tagore, [G. V.] Desani, [Nirad] Chaudhuri, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Anita Desai and others, it has quite a pedigree." "Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist," in *Imaginary Homelands* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 61-70.

Conisbee Baer, that link his writing to European modernism. James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is a key intertext for both critics. Joyce's literary influence on the young Anand was substantial, as Anand himself points out (though perhaps not as substantial as that of Gandhi, who told Anand to strip *Untouchable* of its Joycean "clever tricks"), and Berman reads the overtly political *Coolie* against the ostensibly less political Joyce to argue for an understanding of modernist narrative, particularly when it adopts and critiques the conventions of bildung, as inherently "engaged writing" that demonstrates the action of "the remainder: of play, of the power of language outside the bounds of authority."[8] Meanwhile, Baer's complex account focuses on *Untouchable*, reading that novel's linguistic experiments in the context of Anand's work helping to found the Progressive Writers' Association. In alignment with the Third International's ideal of a Popular Front, the PWA sought to counter imperialism and Fascism on the terrain of culture, and for its South Asian members, this meant cultivating a popular audience for fiction and non-fiction writing in regional languages that would chronicle the plight of those who suffered the most from imperial rule.[9] Written in English and foregrounding through its linguistic experiments the impossibility of "captur[ing] the elusive subaltern figure," *Untouchable* in Baer's account is "a strange and errant intervention, through an experiment on modernism, which supplements the PWA's project of creating a popular art without participating in that project" (586). In its language, the novel seeks to "embody the separation it thematizes (between intellectuals

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[8] Anand, "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*," in *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. R. K. Dhawan (New Delhi: Prestige, 1992), 11; Berman, 466, 481.
[9] See Benjamin Conisbee Baer, "Shit Writing: Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, the Image of Gandhi, and the Progressive Writers' Association," *Modernism/modernity* 16 (2009): 582-586.

and the subaltern) . . . struggl[ing] with the simultaneously alienating and enabling dress of English" (591).

Here, I want to take some distance from both of these accounts and the means by which they link Anand's writing to modernist practice—first, in terms of language. Baer limits his analysis to *Untouchable*, but because his account's focus on linguistic experiment ties it in to the larger history of Indian writing in English evoked by Rushdie, and because *Coolie* shares some of the earlier novel's "Anglophile transvestite" techniques, it is tempting to take this linguistic focus as key to Anand's early work. Berman too follows this line of thinking to argue that *Coolie*'s "pigeon-English . . . provides the moment of potential power for those shut out of conventional hierarchies, since it creates its own system of signification" (482). While Baer's point with regard to *Untouchable* is rigorously argued and convincing, neither account can finally speak to *Coolie*'s primary interests, which are other than linguistic and do not hinge on the development of its central character.

First, on questions of language, it is significant that *Coolie* specifically excludes the representation of untouchable—*Dalit*—experience. As Leela Gandhi and other critics of Anand's first two novels have pointed out, the conflicts depicted in *Coolie* are largely driven by economic class rather than caste. Shouted at by a rude shopkeeper, Munoo thinks to himself, "I let him put me in my place as a coolie, but I was paying for the soda water and I am not an untouchable. I am a Hindu Kshatriya, a Rajput, a warrior" (157). Munoo repeatedly and insistently reminds himself of his caste status in the course of the novel, suggesting a self-consciousness on Anand's part about what aspects of Indian society are being excluded—specifically untouchability. The irony here, of course, is that

it is Munoo's "place as a coolie" that counts—caste, regional origin, religion, and the domestic are all raised in the novel as sites of comfort or amelioration, but none meaningfully persist and most are unmasked as hollow or corrupt. Second, *Untouchable* is quite specific as to the regional languages drawn into its linguistic transvestism—Punjabi and Hindustani—and, as Baer points out, the novel develops an elaborate apparatus around them, including footnotes, parenthetical translations, intentional misspellings, literal translation, and imitated syntax. But while *Coolie*'s movement across the social whole of India brings onstage characters who speak a wider range of regional languages, their difference is less marked and the apparatus pared down; the dialogue and interior states of all the novel's non-English characters are rendered in a roughly consistent style throughout.[10] Though Anand certainly deploys this transvestite language in *Coolie*, and revisits it in later works often to great effect, it is decoupled here from the political problematic of representing specifically subaltern experience, and its markers in the text are smoothed over; it recedes as a primary concern. Transvestite dialogue in *Coolie* gestures toward the impracticality of reproducing regional languages for a metropolitan Anglophone audience, but it steps back from the critical engagement with that impracticality that *Untouchable* embraces. And while Berman's suggestion that the collective speech of the Bombay workers who applaud the calling of a strike indicates "the political importance of a linguistic remainder . . . as the workers begin to take on force through their appropriation of a mode of meaning-making not within the purview of conventional systems of discursive power" is plausible as far as it goes, the logic of the

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[10] Certainly *Coolie* registers in various ways the problems of language and representation; it is worth noting that the speech rendered most strange in *Coolie* is that of a Cockney woman rather than any of the Indian characters—perhaps a suggestion on Anand's part that "regionalism" has its metropolitan components as well.

remainder cuts both ways.[11] The workers' solidarity is destroyed a paragraph later by the very means that help constitute it, as agents of the factory bosses spread a rumor through the crowd that Muslims are kidnapping Hindu children. Anonymous and immune to both verification and to debunking, rumor could be said to reside outside "the purview of conventional systems of discursive power," but here it serves the interests of power quite effectively. Anand's point is that the coolies' problem is not primarily linguistic; it is institutional: they lack access to durable means of collective organization that would enable them to overcome the group prejudices that he presents as inhering in caste, class, ethnicity, or religion. Ultimately, the homogenized presentation of linguistic difference in *Coolie* helps to enable the novel's representation of life in the institutions of British rule, which often seek to efface difference in the service of institutional function. *Untouchable*'s Bakha feels "a burning desire . . . to speak the *tish-mish, tish-mish* which the Tommies spoke"; *Coolie*'s minor bank official Babu Nathoo Ram is pleased "to talk English to a Sahib, on an equal footing."[12]

Neither is *Coolie* straightforwardly assimilable to the tradition of the bildungsroman, even in that genre's "critical" modernist mode (in terms proposed by Gregory Castle) or in its working-through of an "antidevelopmental plot" (in those of Jed Esty).[13] Berman makes the association cautiously and largely in negative terms, routing it through Esty's claim that the disruption of the nation as an organizing frame for social development also disrupts the conventions of the developing protagonist. "Thus,"

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[11] Berman, "Toward a Regional Cosmopolitanism: The Case of Mulk Raj Anand," *Modern Fiction Studies* 55 (2009): 157.
[12] Anand, *Untouchable* [1935] (New York: Penguin, 1940), 39; *Coolie*, 40.
[13] See Gregory Castle, *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2006); and Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012).

Berman argues, "the heroism of a coolie who suffers every conceivable setback on his road to maturity . . . ought to be seen as a model of modernist engagement with the consequences of Enlightenment historicism and the *Bildungsroman*."[14] Certainly, Munoo's primary positive characteristic is what *Coolie*'s narrator calls "his old insouciance, his vigour, his zest for life, his fire—the fire that tingled in the cells of his body at all the sights and sounds about him" (49); and as Jerome Hamilton Buckley demonstrates, this fundamental energy and receptivity to the world are among the most recognizable characteristics of the classic youthful protagonist, who is as a rule "a child of some sensibility."[15] The problem with *Coolie* in regard to this tradition (even in its modernist or late-imperial incarnations of that tradition) is that the novel does not so much critically invert or reconfigure the other standard tropes of the bildung plot as it flattens them out, laying bare their relative *inconsequentiality* in the novel's colonial situation. Orphaned Munoo's family life with his aunt and uncle in his provincial town is stifling, yes; but this does not seem to bother Munoo that much (and in any event, the crisscrossing forms of victimization—economic, caste-based, domestic—that appear in the village are only going to be writ large in the wider world). His schooling awakens certain potentialities, but it does not produce in him a burning desire to depart for the city—instead, "he had meant to go to town when he had passed all his examinations here and was ready to learn to make machines himself" (3). His initiations into sexual life are neither "debasing" nor "exalting" (Buckley 17), but rather muddled and contradictory. And, as Douglas Mao observes of the young Stephen Daedalus, it is difficult to tell

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[14] Berman, "Comparative Colonialisms," 476.
[15] Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974), 17.

whether Munoo's receptivity to the world is "unusual or typical"—whether it issues from something special about Munoo or is simply a trait of youth in general (the novel's title, with its pull toward typicality, suggests the latter).[16] But against Berman's comparative reading, I want to suggest that this is where Munoo and Stephen part ways. *Portrait*'s critical edge is to be found in how it directs the reader's attention, through very close free-indirect narration, to Stephen's dawning awareness of the inadequacy of British-controlled Dublin to his development as an individual and artist. Anand's narrator, by contrast, disengages from Munoo for extended periods, differentiating his position quite clearly from the position of Joyce's; and these perspectival forays become progressively longer, such that by the fourth of the novel's five sections, in which Munoo takes a job at a Bombay mill, we are sifting among the perspectives of Munoo, his friend Lakshami, the mill foreman, the manager Mr. Little, and the mill's chief investor. The novel's last section then devotes about a quarter of its pages to the perspectives of Munoo's Anglo-Indian boss, Mrs. Mainwaring, and her Indian admirer Dr. Marchant. The narrator's attention to the protagonist is thus inversely correlated with the progress of the novel's plot, and the narrator's distance from Munoo produces opportunities for him to elaborate on the ways in which Munoo is, unfortunately, not going to learn about the forces that affect him: "He did not search for causes and effects. He did not know . . . that good health was nourished by the food which money bought" (36); "he knew nothing about directors and shareholders and threatening crises" (226). As Saros Cowasjee suggests, Munoo "does not act, but is acted upon by society. This is not because of the author's predilection for the working of Fate in individual lives (in fact, the contrary is at the heart

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[16] Douglas Mao, *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development, and Literature, 1860-1960* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), 119.

of his writing), but because an underdog's wits are powerless in the face of the complex machinery of economic and religious oppression."[17] Munoo's limitations are, in a sense, prior to Stephen's; he is not provided with the opportunity to come to awareness of the circumstances that hold him down. And while *Portrait* concludes with Stephen prepared to fly away from Dublin, Munoo, while far more geographically mobile, ends his journey almost exactly where he started. Munoo is an energetic cipher; though his biography is the spine of *Coolie*'s narrative, his active but internally static subjectivity does not comprise the novel's primary representational concern.

I dwell at some length on these alternate accounts of the novel because they—and the ways that the novel pulls against them—nonetheless illuminate aspects of *Coolie* that feed into the novel's more fundamental concerns. The ways that *Coolie* demotes biographical form and linguistic experiment (and demotes concomitantly the focus on specifically subaltern experience) feed into its representation of the institutions of the late British Empire in India. This representation is accomplished by the novel's attention to minor characters: characters who, as collections of the shared traits, repeated actions, and valued protocols of institutional life, tend toward type; but who as individuals embody the otherwise incorporeal institution itself. *Coolie* thus mobilizes the typically modernist features outlined by Berman and Baer as second-order tropes in the service of a representational project: a modernist realism concerned in a particular way with the classical realist aspiration to capture totality. *Coolie*, that is to say, aims to grasp the

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[17] Saros Cowasjee, "*Coolie*: An Appraisal," in *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. R. K. Dhawan (Delhi: Prestige, 1992), 67. Cowasjee puts a finer point on this assessment: "When [Munoo] dies, nothing of any real consequence seems lost; nothing but his own lust for life" (67). As C. D. Narasimhaiah writes, "In the circumstances, sheer survival must be looked upon as a triumph of the spirit, the very will to live must be reckoned a strength" (cited in Cowasjee, 67).

institutions of its world—the economic laws, cotton mills, banks, unions, and so on—as autonomous collective structures within a globe-spanning system, the better to delineate both their effects on individuals and the forms of amelioration and possibility that, however fleetingly, can be glimpsed within and between them. As Gail Day argues, in the Lukácsian tradition of realism theory the concept of totality "is surprisingly modest in what it performs; it simply demands that we consider the interrelations and interactions between different phenomena, that we relate the parts to the whole—and that we conceive these parts—the whole and all their relations—as mutable, as both materially constraining and subject to human actions."[18] These phenomena of constraint and enablement are, in *Coolie*, the institutions of empire; and the first condition of *Coolie*'s institutional representation is the relative independence of the narrator (as mentioned above), who, in the moments when he pulls away from Munoo to impress upon the reader the things that Munoo cannot know, often goes on to explore the lives of the secondary figures Munoo encounters.

The novel's aspirations and formal effects are strikingly illustrated in a passage that exemplifies the novel's narration of collectivity. Having lost his pickle factory job in the small provincial city of Daulatpur, Munoo seeks works as a day laborer. He and a group of other workers are told by "a merchant" to "come and lift the sacks in the godown and load Rahmat's bullock cart which is going to the railway station":

FROM GOKAL CHAND, MOHAN LALL

To

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[18] Gail Day, "Realism, Totality and the Militant *Citoyen*: Or, What Does Lukács Have to Do With Contemporary Art?", in *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence: Aesthetics, Politics, Literature*, ed. Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (London: Continuum, 2011), 209.

RALLI BROTHERS, EXPORTERS, KARACHI

> Munoo read the blue Hindustani inscription on the sacks of grain. But he was too young to know the laws of political economy, especially as they govern the export of wheat from India to England. He only rolled the Ralli in his mouth with a taste for its melody and strangeness, as he had often rolled the words of his science primer in the old village days.
>
> All the coolies . . . had sat down to adjust their shoulders to the sacks which lay on the platform. And they arose, some shaking, some straining, some with ease, and began to walk away, bowed under the weight.
>
> Munoo had waited to see how to apply himself to the job. Having seen the others, he imitated their movements from the spitting on the hands to get a grip, to the heaving. (121-122)

The passage opens with the narrator closely aligned with Munoo's viewpoint—indeed, the "inscription" Munoo reads is set apart typographically, as though the reader were seeing it through Munoo's eyes. This again evokes the comparative case of *Portrait*, where Joyce frequently has recourse to similar techniques. Likewise Munoo's notable openness to phenomenological experience; he "roll[s] the word Ralli in his mouth with a taste for its melody and strangeness," much as Stephen Daedalus contemplates the word "tundish" in conversation with the university's Dean of Studies. For Stephen, though, attention to the word provokes awareness of a larger history: "The little word seemed to have turned a rapier point of his sensitiveness against this courteous and vigilant foe. He

felt with a smart of dejection that the man to whom he was speaking was a countryman of Ben Jonson."[19] In contrast, Anand's narrator goes out of his way to remind us that Munoo is unaware of the broader consequences of the inscription; and tragically, as the novel goes on to show, he is never going to be old enough to learn.

Instead, the narrator pushes off from Munoo to embark on a series of rapid expansions of scale, moving from the merchant whose warehouse has packed the grain, to the "bullock cart" and "railway" that will take it to the "exporter" in Karachi, and ultimately to the "laws of political economy" themselves. Though financial "laws" sound immutable and abstract, those that "govern the export of wheat from India to England" are, as economic historian Paul Johnson establishes in his *Making the Market*, as much an active creation of Victorian policy as any of the more visible forms of imperial control, such as police forces and the military.[20] Here those laws are the context for the interplay among the corporation that exports the grain, the warehouses, carts, and state-constructed railway that store and transport it, and the individuals who interact with it, and are finally embodied in the movements of "all the coolies," who undertake the physical labor of transferring the grain. The "spitting on the hands" and "heaving" that this labor requires are performed by each worker in slightly different ways—"some shaking, some straining, some with ease"—and by virtue of these variations the coolies are rendered as discrete individuals; prior to the issuance of the order they are figured only as "a tide of seething

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[19] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. John Paul Riquelme (New York: Norton, 2007), XXX. The questions of language and power that the passage raises are tweaked, though, when Stephen goes on to look up the putatively Irish "tundish" in a dictionary, only to find that, ironically, it is "English and good old blunt English too." "Damn the dean of studies and his funnel!" he writes in his journal. "What did he come here for to teach us his own language or to learn it from us. Damn him one way or the other!"

[20] See Paul Johnson, *Making the Market: Victorian Origins of Corporate Capitalism* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010).

humanity jostling in an ebb and flow of colorful cross purposes" (120), "wave after wave of men" (121). At the same time, this process is not purely individuating: the coolies go from a tide of humanity to a finite number of nonetheless basically interchangeable individuals—interchangeable not only with each other but presumably with any other coolie.

The historical genre most frequently cited as narrating the interactions between individuals and indifferent social structures is naturalism, and the comparison between *Coolie* and the naturalist paradigm is illuminating. In a recent essay, Daniel Mrozowski argues persuasively that one of the animating impulses of American literary naturalism involved a desire to personify the corporation—to lend it, through representative individuals, an embodiment "that is limited, weak, and ultimately mortal." "Writers," Mrozowski writes, "wanted [corporations] to be like people; they wanted a system to coalesce into a recognizable person, to have a system shrink to the size of a single vulnerable human being," in implied pursuit of an answer to the Steinbeckian question, "Who can we shoot"?[21] Frank Norris's "corporate person" S. Behrman thus offers "a hidden consolation, a pleasure afforded to the reader alone" when he falls into a grain silo and is buried alive at the conclusion to *The Octopus*. But while it is certainly the case that Anand's coolies are weak and vulnerable, *Coolie* embodies institutions to different ends. For Anand, the question is not, as it is for Mrozowski's naturalists, one of where we might assign individual blame for the violence done by institutions; both institutions' capacity for violence and the impossibility of blaming any particular individual for that violence are taken for granted. The gap between American naturalism and modernist

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[21] Daniel J. Mrozowski, "How to Kill a Corporation: Frank Norris's *The Octopus* and the Embodiment of American Business," *Studies in American Naturalism* 6 (2011): 166, 161.

realism inheres in part in these divergent approaches to the question of representing institutions; if naturalism wants to figure out who stands for the institution, for Anand the problem is that we are all institutional. *Coolie* asks first, then, not the moral question of what character we might shoot, but the aesthetic question of how to arrange character in a fully institutional social world. The passage above demonstrates how, from the railway to the export corporation to the laws of political economy, the institutions that comprise imperial capitalism demand particular actions of individuals, who, becoming characters through these actions, foreground those institutions in the narrative. This anticipates ideas that Anand would develop more directly in non-fictional forms during World War II; in his memoir-essay of 1946, *Apology for Heroism*, he writes that under the conditions of late empire, "we find those continual alterations in the balance of power which leave wrecks of people behind as the fade-outs of history, shadows in the background of changing world forces" (102). The unusual reversal here—it is not "world forces" that move in the background, as one might expect, but individuals themselves who recede as those "forces" take precedence—is given characterological expression in the coolies who are simultaneously evoked by, and "fade-out" into, the institutions of the imperial economy.

A further twist on this method appears when Munoo arrives at the Sir George White Mill in Bombay. He is confronted by a foreman, Jimmie Thomas, and objects to having to pay a commission for a job, to which another worker replies, "It is the same everywhere . . . the foreman . . . is the most important man in the factory." Munoo thinks, "Indeed . . . the Sahib must be an important man, but his clothes were greasy." Immersed here in Munoo's thoughts, the narrator pulls sharply away in the next sentence:

> [Munoo] did not know that the Sahib in greasy clothes was the virtual master of the factory, from the number of functions entrusted to him. He did not know that he was the employer's agent to engage workmen, the god on whose bounty the workmen depended for the security of their jobs once they had got them; that he was the man in charge, responsible for the supervision of the labourers while at work; that he was the chief mechanic who, with other mechanics, helped keep the machines in running order; that he was the technical teacher of the workers; that he was the intermediary between the employer and the worker (it was through him that the employer signified any change he wished to communicate to the workers); that because of all this he charged every worker in the factory a price for the gift of a job, a price which went up if there were more men about than there were vacancies to fill; and that, incidentally, he ran a moneylender's business; that lastly he was a landlord who owned hundreds of straw huts in the neighbourhood and rented them out to the coolies at a profit. (175)

The passage opens with a typical narratorial assertion of Munoo's inability to understand what we, readers, are about to be told, and given Anand's "love of detail" it is tempting to overlook the passage as merely a didactic aside that disrupts the flow of the narrative. But even as they offer sociological detail, passages like this one play an important role in *Coolie*'s construction of institutional character.

Two pages prior, Jimmie Thomas is given a name and a blustering physical presence. Here, though, the name is effaced, distancing the description from the individual in order to describe the practices and institutionally dictated behaviors that comprise the position of "the foreman"—which is "the same everywhere." The foreman is a particular species of type. There are potentially many, although not an infinite number of, foremen, all of whom share—are foremen by virtue of—the practices described here. Some of these practices are officially sanctioned by the cotton mill (engaging, training and supervising workers, fixing machines, setting regulations) and others become associated with it by virtue of the destructive incentives it creates (commissions, loan-sharking, slum-lording), but these typical actions are not, in any case, drawn simply from the social world at large (as would be the case for classic types like the miser or the clown). They are characteristic of an institution: the mill. What I suggest, following the political scientists James March and Johan Olson, is that this arrangement of demands and opportunities, allied to a material structure, is the institution itself. The institution becomes the stuff of character, and the character Jimmie Thomas, as an assemblage of practices shared by many other foremen, comes to embody the institution itself in the narrative. He is an employee of the mill, but in the sense that all the features of the character are generated from a sort of template of shared practices that comprise the institution itself, he *is* the mill. Furthermore, the passage in which Jimmie's characteristic traits are established embeds types within types, producing a template of actual and potential traits tied to institutional roles. In an effervescence of titles reminiscent of *Nostromo*'s type-phrases, Jimmie becomes "foreman," "Sahib," "agent," "god," "man in charge," "mechanic," "teacher," "intermediary," "moneylender," and

finally "landlord." His potential is exhausted by these roles; or it might be more accurate to say that the notion of Jimmie as an individual capable of particular acts is simply a product of these roles. Nothing he will do in the course of the novel will exceed the frameworks for action presented in this passage, and the narrator's sustained attention to his actions rather than his thoughts suggests the irrelevance of his internal life to his institutional roles. Jimmie Thomas becomes a vector of the mill's ability to structure the social world in myriad ways—both official and unofficial, formal and informal—producing individuals who embody it as characters.

Jimmie Thomas is an especially striking instance of the institutional minor character in *Coolie*, but while the group of institutional traits that coalesce around him produce the whole of his character, the reverse is not the case. That is, the novel returns repeatedly to the seeming inexhaustibility of the mill's productive capacity. In thematic terms, the mill perpetuates itself by turning cotton into textiles; in formal terms, and like the novel's other institutions, it represents itself by turning sets of actions and incentives into individuals. The novel tracks Munoo's first day on the job, with his and his friends' morning routine punctuated by the sound of three whistles:

> The third and final whistle greeted them a few yards from the factory, as they walked with the swarm of other coolies. . . . occasionally one of the many coolies muttered a hoarse curse as he splashed the dirty water of a puddle over his bare legs, or lost his hold on the earth; or "Ram Ram," said a pious old coolie greeting another; or a young coolie peevishly nudged a comrade who was

not agile. For the progress of this swarm was slow, very slow. (183)

Linking this description to the earlier "laws of political economy" passage, where they appear as a "tide" or "wave," the workers are first figured here not as persons but as a "swarm." Indistinct actions appear, untethered to particular individuals: muttering *or* losing hold on the earth, greeting *or* nudging, performed by "one of many," or an "old coolie" or a "young coolie." The group's presence and actions, though, are evoked by the factory whistle, and they grow increasingly differentiated as they approach "the door of the shed which led into the factory." Munoo "follow[s] Hari," then notes that "the other workers did not seem to notice the cramped spaces of the factory, except Hari's wife and her children. All the other coolies filed past as if they lived and ate and slept and *had their being there*" (183). The "as if" is almost facetious here, since the coolies are indeed dependent on the closed economy of the mill for their food and housing, so the final sentence makes exaggeratedly literal how the coolies' emergence on the page is produced by an institutional logic: the mill is where they "have their being." In a real sense that is captured in the novel by this process of individuation and characterization, the workers, like Jimmie Thomas, become perceptible—come into being—as a function of the institutional structure.

Envisioned this way, as a source of being itself, the mill becomes horrifying for reasons that exceed the practical facts of the atrocious conditions inside. But while *Coolie* anatomizes the institutions of British control as a means of laying bare their vast capacity for exploitation and immiseration, it also registers in fleeting moments the potential for accountability and fairness that inheres in the concept of the modern institution. Jimmie

Thomas threatens Munoo with violence for vacating an uninhabitable hut without receiving prior approval, but another worker steps in, saying "Leave them, Sahib" (200):

> "You are insulting a superior," said the foreman. "Are you in your senses?"
>
> "Sahib or no Sahib," Ratan returned, "you may be a foreman, but you have no right to beat the mill employees!"
>
> "I will charge the full rent for the month," said the foreman, relenting. (201)

Anonymizing the position's occupant, this exchange foregrounds Ratan's appeal to Jimmie Thomas's position as foreman, not to his sympathy as a moral individual, to stop the beating. Jimmie Thomas's interior life and biography ("sometime mechanic in a Lancashire mill" [172]), for example, are irrelevant to this exchange, because what counts are the broadly accessible protocols of the mill (accessible enough that the coolies are aware of them) and the position of foreman. While the role of foreman in the institutional structure of the mill enables certain forms of action (training workers, engaging in graft), it constrains others (beating the employees), and on this basis, at least in this episode, the "huge," "greasy" foreman relents. But, of course, there is a trap built in: Jimmie Thomas relents by shifting from a course of action not sanctioned by the institution—beating the employees—to one that is—gouging them on rent. Indeed, his relenting only makes the overall extractive function of the mill more effective, since, as the novel dramatizes elsewhere, the coolies' employment amounts to indentured servitude by means of debt: pay is cut for production errors, loans are advanced at usurious rates, access to food and clothing is restricted to the company's own price-

gouging stores, and the rent is more than they can afford. A fleeting moment of amelioration that *Coolie* accesses through its attention to institutional character is thus folded back into the novel's indictment of late-colonial Indian society.

The insight generated by passages like these—that the institutional character tends toward type because of the institution's relative indifference to the particulars of character outside the bounds of institutional protocols—is expanded, and complicated, from the novel's beginning by way of its first significant minor character: Munoo's uncle, "Daya Ram, the Chaprasi of the Imperial Bank of India" (4). Daya Ram emerges over the course of several pages. He is first seen taking "big military strides, in his gold-brocaded coat and white turban, along the circuitous hill road constructed by the Angrezi Sarkar, of which he felt himself to be the symbol" (5). Here, the scale of the narration expands unevenly, moving in one sentence from Daya Ram's disciplined strides, to the bank uniform he wears, to the road he walks on, built (presumably with financing from his bank) by the imperial state he feels he now symbolizes. The passages suggests that Daya Ram's "imperious" behavior has little to do with innate personality—indeed, he "wants to soften and be kind" but "irritably . . . stiffens his . . . body" (5). Moving from disposition to bodily comportment to dress to infrastructure to symbolism, the sentence maps how the character named Daya Ram embodies the Imperial Bank as "the Chaprasi."[22]

Like Jimmie Thomas, Daya Ram is a special incarnation of type. As Alex Woloch writes, "How do you represent ten people who share the same living conditions, or ten

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[22] "Chaprasi" is a term for a minor functionary, particularly with messenger or "go-fer" duties (as the novel makes clear). Calling Daya Ram "*the* Chaprasi," as though he were the only one, thus satirically indicates his interchangeability with any number of other individuals occupying the same role.

thousand people who all belong to the same social class? You can find common traits and conjure up a single individual who exemplifies much more widespread characteristics."[23] The type thus presents an individual who stands in for a general social category. The problem, Woloch argues, is that "this dialectic between the particular and the general . . . does not necessarily account for the underlying multiplicity of the larger group of people. Between a particular individual and a general social category is a mass of discrete persons" (250). The institution is one form of social arrangement that falls into this space between the particular individual and the general social category. Jimmie Thomas is one among a large but not infinite number of foremen; similarly Daya Ram among Imperial Bank officials (similarly, too, the coolies whose employment shifts their figuration from a "seething tide" to a finite though indefinite number of individuals). These characters are institutional types, standing not for a general category but for a historically delimited institution comprised of "discrete persons." Institutional character thus ties types to the historical conditions of those types' emergence; which is to say, to the increased visibility of institutions themselves as actors and contexts for action in the world of late empire.

As Woloch suggests, and as I have aimed to demonstrate in slightly different terms in the case of Jimmie Thomas, the typical character is "ontologically unstable": "On the one hand, he is pressed into that static fusion of the particular and the general. . . . on the other hand, he is drowned out by the actual plurality of individuals who compose this social group" (250). *Coolie* registers both the formal and social consequences of this instability, illustrating the shared nature of institutional characteristics. When Daya Ram arrives at the bank, he meets Pir Din, the bank's "head peon," in "the gold-braided coat

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[23] Alex Woloch, *The One versus the Many* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004), 249.

which he, too, wore" (9). Both lackeys are affiliated with sub-accountant Babu Nathoo Mal, who wears "a pyramidal kulah of red velvet" and distinctive "black boots" (11), which in turn tie him to "the burra Sahib" of the Bank, in his "strange brown boots" (12). Daya Ram is a poor high-caste Hindu; Pir Din is a "Muhammadan" with a "fiery, henna-dyed beard" (9); the Babu is an educated man with "forty thousand shares in the Allahabad Bank . . . a trusted ally of the government which owned most of the banks" (37); while the burra Sahib is, of course, an Englishman. These figures are rendered in increasingly abstract terms as the narrator moves up the institutional hierarchy: where Daya Ram is given a name and a personality, the "burra Sahib" appears only as "a grim apparition" in "strange boots." So each figure is connected to the others vertically, one might say, by their place in the Bank's chain of command, but they are also linked horizontally by the narrator's attention to the common features of their costume and bearing. The traits that initially individuate Daya Ram dissolve outward into the larger, but not infinite, group of "discrete individuals" who comprise the Bank, situating those individuals within the common life of the institution. Through a process of differentiation and effacement, the features that are emblematic of the Bank threaten to overwhelm the features of caste, economic class, ethnicity, and religion that determine inequalities of power in the broader social world of the novel.

Indeed, while the novel's deployment of institutional character is continually tied to the harm done by imperialism—by institutions as a social technology—*Coolie* likewise refuses to affirm tradition, culture, and religion as stays against the encroachment of imperial power, or, relatedly, to offer the domestic as a shelter from the exploitive world. Partha Chatterjee, in an influential formulation, argues that anticolonial

nationalist thought typically separates "material" from "spiritual" concerns, conceding imperial dominance in the first but using the second as an incubator in which to grow a national identity distinct from that of the colonizing power.[24] But Anand joins these two spheres in rejecting them; as he would write, "My hatred of imperialism was bound up also with my disgust for the cruelty and hypocrisy of Indian feudal life, with its castes, creeds, dead habits and customs, and its restrictive religious rites and practices" (*Apology* 86).

Examples of Anand's thematic unmasking of traditional forms abound in the novel. The pastoral life of the village, valorized by Anand's sometime mentor Gandhi, turns out to rest on a foundation of economic violence; orphan Munoo thinks of how "the landlord had seized his father's five acres of land. . . . his father had died a slow death of bitterness and disappointment and left his mother a penniless beggar, to support a young brother-in-law and a child in arms" (2-3). (And in the village, moreover, exploitation is personal; the landlord is the father of Munoo's playmate Jay Singh.) Munoo's brief sojourn as a disciple at a shrine ends with his abrupt departure when he discovers that the supposedly chaste yogi assists in "the births of 'sons of God' to the wives of the merchant class" (135)—by having sex with the young women. And a third example comes in the complicated climax to Munoo's employment in the Bombay cotton mill. Here, the fiery speech delivered by a leader of the militant Red Star Union culminates with the assembled crowd reciting charter, ending with the demand that "We want our organizations to be recognized by law" (234). Almost immediately, this moment of unity is shattered: "a screaming crescendo of pain shot into the air through the edge of the

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[24] See Partha Chatterjee, "Whose Imagined Community?", in *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), 3-13.

crowd": "Kidnapped! . . . Kidnapped by the Pathans! . . . These bullying, swaggering Muslims are kidnapping Hindu children" (234). While the rumor turns out to be false, and serves the interests of the mill ownership (the rally becomes a riot, and the impending strike dissolves into sectarian violence and a military crackdown), the novel goes to noticeable lengths to emphasize that the rumor's success is largely a product of prejudices associated with what Anand calls "Indian feudal life." The ground for the rumor about "Pathan" kidnappers is prepared by the union leader himself, who asks the crowd, "How many of you have not been pounced upon by the Pathan warder and moneylender outside the mill gates and even inside, on pay day?" (233)—the only portion of his speech that does not appeal to specifically class concerns. Roaming the city in the aftermath of the riots, Munoo overhears Hindu activists and a Muslim dignitary offer contradictory accounts of the violence, competing narratives that the narrator, so quick to intervene elsewhere, does not attempt to reconcile, as though there would be no point. This is not to deny that forms of cultural affinity appear in the course of the novel, as in the relationship between Munoo and Ratan, the pro-union worker whose firing helps spark the strike: "The friendship between Munoo and Ratan grew, as friendship can only grow between two spontaneous, naïve, warm-hearted men of the Punjab" (208). But such moments are quickly overwhelmed by large-scale events that are fueled by those affinities, such as the riot.

Similarly, the novel systematically evokes visions of a reparative domestic sphere only to shatter them, though here the key term is gender rather than ethnicity, caste, or religion. Orphaned from the beginning, Munoo acquires surrogate families at each stage of his journey—or, more specifically, surrogate mothers, female characters being with

one key exception confined entirely to the domestic. Absent from the narrative's modern institutions, women appear in these domestic contexts as by turns threatening and smothering, bad mothers in the guise of good or vice-versa (which amounts to the same thing here), and circumstances conspire to expel Munoo from each family situation. Bibiji, wife of Munoo's first boss, is likened to "not a woman but a collection of blandishments" (12), either silent or "shriek[ing] continuously" (13). Parbati, wife of the pickle factory owner, "soothes the unbearable agony in his limbs with kind words such as his mother used to utter: 'May I be your sacrifice! May I die for you! May I suffer instead of you!' . . . she would lie down by him and take him into her arms while he was tossing himself from side to side, restless and weak, and he would fall sound asleep, drugged into a stupor by the warmth that radiated from her comfortable body, intoxicated by the wonderful tenderness that was in the smell of her body" (94-95). Mrs. Mainwaring, the dissolute Anglo-Indian woman whose employ Munoo falls into at novel's end, alternately gives him manicures and works him literally to death. He "stirs the chords of her being in a strangely disturbing fashion," and while it is not clear that her desire is acted upon, Munoo's death is figured as an almost sexualized exhaustion: night after night after night he pulls her around in a rickshaw until he drops.

Thus, as Kristin Bluemel puts it, women in the novel are divided into "two camps of perversely sexual virgins and frigid whores."[25] Given that Bluemel shows how Anand addresses women and patriarchal mores in far more nuanced ways in his later writing, the portrayal of female characters in *Coolie* is a more significant, and more ideological, failure of craft than his "love of detail." But Bluemel further suggests that the portrayal of

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[25] Kristin Bluemel, *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics: Intermodernism in Literary London* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 86.

women in Anand's early novels was partially responsible for those novels' relative commercial success:

> Anand's fictional women provided the majority of his readers . . . with an essential and essentialized referent that could smooth away threats of cross-cultural difference posed by his male protagonists. . . . his novels threatened many members of London's intellectual circles with their tendency to lead readers from a criticism of India's caste and class system to a criticism of British imperialism. The fact that Anand's novels do not require his readers in Britain or India to extend that same criticism to the patriarchal structures of British institutions implies that Anand was on some level asking his readers to accept sexism in order to uproot imperialism. (80-81)

The upshot is that "the reader can finish *Coolie* with the impression that it is women who condemn Munoo to death" (86).

When it comes to the reception of Anand's novels, Bluemel's claim is certainly plausible, although the evidence she provides is ultimately circumstantial. However, the claim about the text itself—that it turns oppression at the hands of the imperial system into oppression at the hands of women—is less persuasive, not because it is clear that Munoo's death is due to other identifiable causes, but because of the novel's surprising emphasis on the contingency of his demise. Readers might expect Munoo's death to come at the hands of, say, an industrial accident, thus putting a final twist on the novel's critique of global capital; but despite his tribulations, Munoo is strong and in good health at the end of the fourth section, after the riots. He is then struck by Mrs. Mainwaring's car

in an accident that is, if anything, a result of his innate capacity for aesthetic absorption (he is "[standing] dazed" in the middle of a hill road staring down at the sparkling city when the car rounds a corner and hits him [248]). This accident is the proximate cause of his subsequent ill health, which combined with overwork leaves him susceptible to consumption; but this is merely implied in the text. The lack of a tight connection between Munoo's death and the circumstances of his life is surprising if we assume with many of its critics that the novel's sole interest is in a moral critique tied to the biographical arc of Munoo's life (that is, in ultimately finding someone to shoot). It makes more sense, though, in the context of a narrative that, in formal terms, is more interested in finding ways to represent imperial institutions, and that frequently performs its critique by staging violent encounters between competing ways of ordering collective life, as in the riots.

In any case, neither traditional social structures, nor religion, nor the domestic sphere, however problematically rendered, ultimately offer a basis for renovating Indian society, or even a shelter from the violence of that society, in *Coolie*.[26] The village presents the oppressions of the wider world in more personal terms; religious leaders are corrupt; families expel Munoo or smother him.[27] But neither can it be said that the brief moments of accountability and equality proffered by bank, factory and union play an

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[26] The novel thus suggests the insufficiency of the frequent characterization of Anand as "India's Dickens." See, for example, Premila Paul, "Major Themes in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand," in Dhawan, 19.

[27] Bluemel cites an exchange between Anand and Saros Cowasjee in the late sixties and early seventies that suggests an even closer connection between the novel's representation of women and its criticisms of Indian categories of identity. Cowasjee suggests that Anand revise *Coolie*'s ending because of its extended and offensive treatment of May Mainwaring. Anand responds that "there was no racial attack intended." "It is interesting," Bluemel notes, "that in the 1970s Anand thought readers might accuse him of offensive racial, rather than sexual, stereotypes" (195n24). Certainly it suggests a continued blindness to issues of gender in his writing on the part of Anand. But in its insistence that he not be understood as drawing on racial types, the exchange also highlights Anand's refusal of the resources of cultural difference that reside in "Indian feudal life."

overtly redemptive role in individual lives. Instead, institutions' capacity in the novel to produce character while effacing its particularities most often creates what Ashis Nandy memorably terms "intimate enemies"; for example, in a fantastically awkward scene where Babu Nathoo Mal invites a fellow bank employee (named, naturally, Mr. England) to his home, hoping "to get him to write a recommendation before he was influenced by all the other English officers in the club and began to hate all Indians" (37). Nathoo Mal is horrified when his rasgulas and gulab jaman cause Mr. England to "recoil" in the sweltering heat; England, meanwhile, expects his host's home to "be like the house of 'Abdul Kerim, the Hindoo', in that Hollywood film called *The Swami's Curse*" (39). The predictable failure of the meeting through its misunderstandings, and the reassertion of hierarchy that results, is only heightened by the assumptions of commonality produced in both men by a shared professional framework. As B. B. Misra's *The Bureaucracy in India* shows in historical terms, the expansion of secular institutions in late-colonial India through the era of Independence, while creating economic opportunities for certain marginalized groups, did not erase distinctions of caste, class, or religion; instead, it more often reified them, creating what Misra terms "vested interests in backwardness."[28] *Coolie* could be termed an institutional novel not only for its methods of characterization but also for the way that it arranges and plays the institutions of its narrative off one another, inviting us to make discriminations among them in much the same way that a novel of ideas embodies and dramatizes antagonistic systems of thought.[29] If this is the case, though, *Coolie*'s apparent disenchantment with both traditional and modern,

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[28] B. B. Misra, *The Bureaucracy in India: An Historical Analysis of Development up to 1947* (Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), ix.
[29] On this type of generic comparison see Simon During, *Exit Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 97.

technologized institutions makes it difficult to assess where its commitments lie beyond pity for its central character, and indeed this is where critical accounts of the novel have most commonly ended up.

As I have tried to demonstrate, though, *Coolie* weaves together two different levels of narrative: Munoo's journey is the occasion for the novel's exploration of institutions, which remains relatively independent of the biographical arc of the protagonist; Munoo himself passes through various institutions of British India without being a product of any one of them (again, the comparison with *Nostromo* and Nostromo is instructive). But in its exploration of institutions—in the level of its narrative that is relatively independent of Munoo's unhappy trajectory—*Coolie* gestures toward an unlikely source of value, one that is suggested primarily by the formal mechanics of institutional character themselves. The mode of character at work in Daya Ram, Jimmie Thomas, and the anonymous coolies' embodiment of the protocols of the bank, mill, or "laws of political economy" ultimately serves to make institutions as such visible in the novel; to narrate them; to give them an aesthetic home. Precisely because these characters are too unindividuated or positively unappealing to draw our sympathy as Munoo does, I want to suggest that what *Coolie*'s institutional narrative captures is what Walter Benn Michaels, following Bertolt Brecht, calls "the beauty of a social problem":

> If we think what matters about our relation to the unemployed is our ability to feel their pain, we're missing the point. And if we think that political art should provide identification rather than "beauty," we're missing it again. Rather, to feel the beauty of the problem is precisely *not* to feel the pathos of the suffering

> produced by the problem; it's instead to feel the structure that makes the problem.[30]

On one level, *Coolie* clearly does want to make its readers attend to the pathos of the suffering of individuals like Munoo; but it short-circuits that individualized pathos by emphasizing Munoo's lack of alternatives (in a way the contingency of his death reinforces this; it could have happened no matter what). Minimizing the tropes of the critical Bildung narrative, developing its wide-ranging narratorial perspective, and embodying the institutions of the imperial economy in character, it redirects our attention from the individual to institutional structures. And as it does so, showing us institutions in character, it embeds an ideal account of how institutions might function. When the features that individuate Daya Ram are shown to circulate promiscuously among the other individuals who comprise the bank, regardless of external features of individual identity, the bank's simultaneous production and effacement of character suggests that the successful occupation of a particular institutional role might theoretically be independent of personal traits that are irrelevant to the performance of that role, even if this is not actually borne out in the narrative. When the workers appeal to Jimmie Thomas's position as foreman to stop a beating, rather than to the individual himself as a moral actor, it suggests that if institutional protocols are publicly shared, they offer a means of holding institutional authority accountable on its own terms. A literary-critical tradition particularly alert to subversive or counter-hegemonic textual elements might read these moments of institutional fairness and accountability in terms of what Michel de Certeau calls "tactics," "makeshift cultural maneuvers that bring moments of

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[30] Walter Benn Michaels, "The Beauty of a Social Problem," *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 2011. http://www.brooklynrail.org/2011/10/art/the-beauty-of-a-social-problem

innovation into rigid social disciplines."[31] In her *Cosmopolitan Style,* Rebecca Walkowitz shows how such tactics are central to a certain strain of modernist fiction, "emphasiz[ing] the connections between private acts or opportunities and institutional systems" (27). But what is crucial to such moments in *Coolie* is precisely the public and shared nature of the acts that comprise character, and their predication on a logic internal to the institutional system. These passages in *Coolie* gesture not to moments of individual ingenuity in twisting or deforming institutional demands, but to the ideal functioning of the institution itself. Unlike the novel's fleeting evocations of domestic comfort or cultural affinity, they suggest—though they do not dramatize at length—the idea that fairness and accountability might inhere in durable institutions that would make issues of identity irrelevant.

Where *Coolie* gestures toward a source of value, then, is in the novel's formal embrace of a concept of the institution that looks very much like the utilitarian social structure as envisioned by Jeremy Bentham, who, Frances Ferguson suggests, "attacked what we would think of as identity groups by arguing that social structures did not need to seek to know more about the character of the individuals that people them, and by arguing against the notion that there were any particular kinds of actions that could be seen as organizing character."[32] "Utilitarian social structures," Ferguson writes, "were developed to be environments that would elicit actions from individuals by making persons visible to one another, by creating artificial groupings that made individuals feel

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[31] Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2006), 26; see Michael de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1974), trans. Steven Rendell (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984).
[32] Frances Ferguson, *Pornography, the Theory: What Utilitarianism Did to Action* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004), 23.

their 'propinquity' in time and space" (3-4). *Coolie* repeatedly indexes the failure of the institutions of British India to offer this type of visibility, and often does so in literal terms, as in the interplay of looks and refusals to look as Munoo encounters members of the Bank hierarchy: meeting the Babu, he "dare[s] not raise his head to look at the person he addressed" (10); the burra Sahib is only "the apparition of a man" at whom Munoo "dare[s] not look" (11, 12).[33] But it also attends to the practical application of such visibility, as in the scene of collective discrimination at the union rally, held in response to the decision of the mill management to put the factories on "short work" (228). The crowd of workers is made up of

> all these dwellers of the slums, the feeble new-born babes, the naked children with distended stomachs, the youths disfigured by smallpox and sores and hookworm, the men who were old without ever having been young, the women whose bellies were always protuberant with the weight of the unborn, the aged who hobbled about slobbering down the sides of their mouths and stinking[.] (229)

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[33] Of course, as Edward Said writes, citing Eric Stokes, "the influence of Bentham and the Mills on British rule in the Orient (and India particularly) was considerable." *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 214. See Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959). Ranajit Guha demonstrates that utilitarian theory and practice played a key role in the development of British rule in India as a form of "dominance without hegemony"—that is, to use Guha's terms, a situation in which coercion outweighs persuasion in establishing dominance. In this situation, the colonizing power and the Indian bourgeoisie competed to acquire hegemony by attempting to assimilate the bulk of Indian civil society to their projects of rule (such attempts, Guha argues, always failed). Though this is not the place to make the argument at length, I would suggest that Anand's rendering of modern institutions as analogous to utilitarian social structures registers the political hope that the autonomy of such institutions, and their potential to articulate individuals regardless of identity, would make them arenas in which a genuinely Indian hegemony could be established. *Coolie*'s exclusion of specifically subaltern experience, in this reading, would dovetail with Guha's argument, and that of the Subaltern Studies group of which he was a member, that bourgeois nationalism was ultimately not able to represent the South Asian masses.

This description emphasizes the heterogeneity of the factory's population, and the narrator proceeds to range through the crowd, recording the speech of "a wizened old workman," "a middle-aged man," and "a youngster" (229) as they debate the issues at hand. The crowd becomes the collective agent of a kind of rough-and-ready democracy; first, they hear a long-winded speech from Lalla Onkar Nath, "President of the All India Trade Union Federation" (231), whose arguments for negotiation and an understanding of the common interest of the workers and owners are ill-received: "'What about the strike?" someone shouted. 'What is the Union going to do about the order for short work?'" (231). In the face of the workers' skepticism, Nath is silenced by Sauda, of "the Red Flag Union," who argues compellingly for an immediate strike, is approved by the crowd ("'That is right! That is the right talk!' some voices shouted" [232]), and leads them in reciting a list of demands. It is not clear whether the crowd has chosen correctly; despite Lalla Onkar Nath's expression of "sardonic contempt" (230), his argument is not self-evidently wrong, and the riots break out before the strike can be implemented. But the crowd of downtrodden coolies is given an opportunity to choose between two courses of collective action, presented in a situation in which the identities of the arguments' proponents are not determinative—indeed, one of the founders of the Red Flag Union is not himself from India but is noted as "a fellow called Jackson, from Manchester" (224). The rally becomes in a sense a public enactment of the mechanisms at the heart of the novel's account of institutional character. The strike never gets off the ground because, as I've suggested, it lacks an institutional context that would enable it to take durable form and overcome the pull of other forms of collective organization, like religion and caste.

I have sought to trace here how *Coolie*'s investment in institutional character as a means to capture the totality of late-imperial British India, and its critique of the grounds of distinctively "Indian" culture (as caste, religion, identity, and so forth) as a resource for social organization, produce a conceptual engagement with the idea of the modern institution. The process of rendering "the beauty of a social problem" here suggests, secondarily, a means of turning that problem to account. *Coolie*'s project is sustained and altered in subsequent works of Anand's early career that depart from the conventions of the biographical arc in different ways to further anatomize the institutions of British India. *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), Anand's first novel after *Coolie*, divides its attention among several would-be protagonists as it tells a story of labor unrest, rape, and murder on an Assam tea plantation. Dr. John de la Havre undertakes a perennially frustrated quest to make the "syndicates" (15) implement an infrastructure plan that will help eradicate malaria; in the meantime, his medical practice brings him into contact with Gangu, a plantation worker, whose difficulties prompt De la Havre to intervene in various ways on his behalf. After a group of workers are beaten after seeking redress at the prompting of De la Havre, violence breaks out and R.A.F. planes arrive with "a platoon of the Yorkshire Light Infantry" and "two companies of the Eastern Frontier Rifles." Gangu survives the unrest but his murdered by Reggie Hunt, a malignant plantation overseer, while protecting his daughter from Hunt's attempted rape. The novel's final chapter is a single page of dialogue: the delivery of a "not guilty" verdict in the murder trial. The novel devotes particular attention to the interplay of government and business in the extraction of what amounts to forced labor from the plantation workers, and to the ways in which institutions like the plantation, the military, and the colonial

club work as generators of character. *Across the Black Waters* (1941), the second in a trilogy of novels (preceded by *The Village* [1939] and followed by *The Sword and the Sickle* [1942]), follows Anand's Punjabi peasant protagonist Lal Singh to World War I Flanders with a division of the Indian Army. Graham Parry justifiably calls it "a classic of cultural dislocation," which mobilizes all of the standard tropes of the Great War novel but does through characters who "are completely bewildered by everything they meet, so that the brief pleasures and long horrors of their campaign are heightened by the incomprehensibility of their situation."[34] *Black Waters* also heightens and concentrates some of *Coolie*'s institutional concerns, staging them in a single context—the military—while the plot and setting work to strip away many of the external features associated with Indian-ness, in passages like the following:

> [Lal Singh] felt he was a different species of man from the Tommies who were cheering the troops, not because they were white soldiers and he was a Hindustani sepoy (for from the way that the Tommies had lived and moved in the trenches under the same conditions as the sepoys that difference had now ceased to exist), but because the men outside the café, like the enthusiastic Sikhs who had relieved the 69th, had already rested and were living to a different rhythm from the sepoys who came from the black hell of the trenches.[35]

The novel's central drama, then, involves the relationship between the military's erasure of traditional marks of identity and the forms of freedom this erasure creates; the desire to

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[34] Graham Parry, "Anand, Orwell and the Great War," in Dhawan, 34.
[35] Anand, *Across the Black Waters* (1941) (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2008), 152.

hold on to these markers in a world where, as Parry suggests, everything is bewildering; and the omnipresent threat of a different kind of erasure by death in the trenches.

Across the Black Waters was an inauspicious beginning to Anand's wartime writing career. As a novel about the horrors of war and the displacement inflicted by imperial rule, by a writer hostile to British control of India, published just as Britain was entering World War II, it was poorly received by a literary public not in the mood for reminders of wartime brutality and British culpability. This seems not to have dissuaded Anand, who in 1942 would publish *Letters on India*, with its adversarial introduction by Leonard Woolf. *Letters* is arranged as a series of eighteen (imagined) exchanges between Anand and "Tom Brown," an English factory worker and union member. Excerpts from Tom's letters appear first, followed by Anand's essayistic replies. *Letters* begins by addressing the development of contemporary proposals for Indian self-government, then ranges over the entire history of British colonialism and nationalist response, building to an argument for socialism and immediate Indian independence. In his *Apology for Heroism*, which would appear a few years later, Anand characterizes the challenge facing India not as one of overturning an existent system—surprisingly—but as "a renaissance [and] an enormous reformation" (111), and the *Letters* places alongside its call for revolution a sustained attention to the institutional history of the Indian state and economy. In letter XIV, Anand writes,

> Now, throughout these letters, I have tried to show the workings of the laws of cause and effect, specially in history. It is not that men borrow each other's ideas and graft them on to their localities, but that one fact in history begets another. What I mean may be

> concretely put this way: it is not British ideas of this, that or the other thing, which have created the Indian national movement, but the British Government as an historical force which, by introducing a system of railways, post and telegraphs and establishing a central bureaucracy, created the conditions for a movement of protest against the inadequacy of this machine of Government and of its financial, political and cultural stranglehold on the people of India. The ideology of the protest movement developed out of this struggle.[36]

This passage articulates a stance toward empire's institutions that refuses the language of rupture, much as Anand's modernist realism refuses the ruptures of avant-garde models in its aspiration to social totality. It detaches India's modern institutions of railway, post, telegraphs, and bureaucracy from the power that constituted them—"the British Government as an historical force"—and in doing so envisions those institutions as durable but autonomous, by their nature not necessarily beholden to particular interests, and capable of "creat[ing] the conditions for a movement of protest" against their own "inadequacy." Bluemel suggests that "Anand's nonfiction presents more thoroughly, consistently radical heroes than his fiction, in part because his autobiographical narratives are freed from the constraints of modernism" (93). And Anand himself refers to what he calls the "assertiveness . . . of my [nonfiction] formulations, against the tentative insights shown in my novels."[37] But as I have tried to show, the genealogy of Anand's modernism is not, as Bluemel suggests, that of "the stream of consciousness novel"; *Coolie*'s

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[36] Anand, *Letters on India* (London: Routledge, 1942), 115-16.
[37] Anand, Preface to the third edition of *Apology for Heroism*, n.p.

radicalism inheres not in its propositional content but in its attempt to trace out the beauty of its social problems and the potential buried within them.[38] If *Letters* "asserts" a revolutionary institutional politics, *Coolie*, to a greater extent even than the other novels of Anand's early career, does something qualitatively different, making visible in character the experiential basis of that politics as its characters emerge and dissolve, "shadows in the obscure background" of institutional totality.

"Today, we are situated in the midst of a total world," Anand writes, "and what happens to one country happens to another."[39] The institutions figured by *Coolie*—factory, union, finance, and so forth—emerge in the novel as global forms, products of a system in which "India has been made into a suburb of London, New York, or Chicago, politically, economically, and culturally."[40] From India's "suburban" vantage, then, the novel, like the other texts I discuss, registers late empire not in negative Jamesonian terms, but works rather as what Jed Esty and Colleen Lye term "peripheral realism," aimed at "the remapping of the world-system as a positive, if partial and mediated, object of representation."[41] If *Coolie*, then, draws our attention repeatedly to the ways that the novel can represent institutional life (and represent collectivity more generally), it also encourages us, more than any of the other works I examine here, to consider different arrangements of the lineages of modernism and Anglophone writing. In its experiments with institutional character, *Coolie* might be read alongside or Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), distant as that work might seem, rather with Anand's contemporary Raja Rao, whose *Kanthapura* (1938) writes collectivity in quite different ways, using the first

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[38] Bluemel, 93.
[39] Anand, *Apology for Heroism*, 168.
[40] Anand, *Apology for Heroism,* 154
[41] Jed Esty and Colleen Lye, "Peripheral Realisms Now," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73 (2012): 280.

person plural to narrate the passage of time from within the life of a popular movement. *Coolie* might also share more with Elizabeth's Bowen's juxtapositions of Anglo-Irish aristocracy and technocratic cosmopolitanism than with Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), which narrates the slow death of the traditions of the Muslim city. It is to Bowen that I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Impersonality, War, and Elizabeth Bowen's Crypto-Institutionalism

Elizabeth Bowen appears in historical perspective as an untimely writer: her life and her work seem often to have been suspended not only between disparate places but also between disparate senses of time. The same age as the twentieth century, as she put it, she was born in the precise historical moment in which the term "Anglo-Irish" attained maximal significance, between the beginning of the decline of the Protestant landowning class it designated (who had once thought of themselves simply as Irish) and the founding of the Free State, in which that class lost its historical justification entirely. She was an only child and the heir to her family's Big House, Bowen's Court, and her first seven years were divided between summers at the house in County Cork and winters in Dublin. Her father Robert was the first Bowen to take up a profession, becoming a lawyer to generate the income that gentlemanly farming no longer could in urbanizing Ireland; the breakdowns he suffered, apparently from stress, led his wife and daughter to move to England at the suggestion of his doctors when Bowen was seven. As she admits in a 1950 interview with Jocelyn Brooke, she was a writer "whose interest lies chiefly in a sense of place," and on leaving Ireland she discovered the coastal landscape of Kent, which, along with London and Bowen's Court itself, would inform her imaginary geography throughout her career.[1] She spent the war years in Kent with summers at Bowen's Court; attended art school in London and married Alan Cameron, a successful administrator with the British Board of Education, in 1923. In the same year she published her first

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[1] Bowen, "A Conversation between Elizabeth Bowen and Jocelyn Brooke," in *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2010), 274.

book of short stories, *Encounters*. She came too late to make the scene of high modernism, and her friendships with figures like Virginia Woolf (with whom she became close) came years later—she would refer to them as "the great elder group, to me, the people in Bloomsbury." Her own generation she considered to include Henry Green, Graham Greene, Rosamond Lehmann, and Evelyn Waugh, and the Oxford coterie of Isaiah Berlin, Maurice Bowra, and Cyril Connelly.[2] In 1930, her father died and she inherited Bowen's Court, which had remained intact through the Troubles when many of the nearby houses were burned. Bowen spent World War II writing short stories, volunteering as an Air Raid Precautions warden in her London neighborhood of Regent's Park, and working for the British Ministry of Information producing reports on the political situation in neutral Eire, to whose leadership her literary reputation and background gave her access.[3] She also began an affair with Canadian diplomat Charles Ritchie that continued, in one form or another, for the rest of her life, though she remained happily married. She and Alan Cameron intended to move to Bowen's Court full-time in 1952, but his death in the same year placed her in reduced financial

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[2] Bowen, "Frankly Speaking: Interview, 1959," in *Listening In*, 343.

[3] A blunter way of putting this, of course, is to say that she was a spy in her home country for a foreign power, Victoria Glendinning's *Elizabeth Bowen: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1978) refers to her work as "reporting" (193) and does not examine in detail the conversations she had while in Ireland. Glendinning does recount that Lord Cranborne, at the Ministry of Information, occasionally passed on to Winston Churchill Bowen's reports, primarily those on Irish attitudes toward the question of British access to Irish ports (204). The importance of Anglo-Irish ambivalence and hybridity to most critical accounts of Bowen's career goes some way to naturalizing her wartime work, but the basic facts remain: as a citizen of Ireland, she met and recorded conversations with politicians, journalists, and academics who did not know their views were being sent back to the highest levels of the British government. The Fine Gael politician James Dillon, upon finding out thirty years later, was, according to historian R. F. Foster, "furious at what he saw as a betrayal of trust." Foster, "The Irishness of Elizabeth Bowen," in *Paddy and Mr. Punch* (London: A. Lane, 1993), 117. Foster calls her "a kind of spy" and refers to the "ambiguity of her stance" (117); Colm Toibin, in a review of Foster's book, responds: "Bowen's Irishness is not of mere academic interest to [Foster]; there is always the implication that Ireland must take Bowen and her tradition on board if Ireland is to survive. What, then . . . are we to do about Elizabeth Bowen's activities in Ireland during the war years, when she posed as a journalist or a woman-about-town but was, in fact, spying for the British Ministry of Information? Where was her Irishness then? In any other country, would this not be treachery?" Toibin, "New Ways of Killing Your Father," *London Review of Books*, 18 November 1993: 3-6.

circumstances, and she was soon driven out of Ireland again, across early Cold War Europe as a journalist and to a number of American universities as a sought-after teacher of writing. She died in 1973, having sold Bowen's Court and seen it dismantled, and having returned late in life to a small house in Hythe, Kent.

Thus a set of places, with their own distinct temporal rhythms, overlap in her life and work: agrarian Anglo-Ireland, where, she wrote, "I know of no house . . . in which, while the present seems to be there forever, the past is not pervadingly felt"; suburban Kent, where she moved throughout her childhood and which gave her the variously inflected Edwardian villas of her novels, with names like Waikiki, Cathay and Holme Dene; London, especially in wartime, which was, as Victoria Glendinning writes, "her noon" (177); the continent in the early Cold War, characterized by rapid travel and bureaucratic delay; and the American academic semesters of her affiliations with creative writing programs and English departments. Unlike the canonically enshrined modernists of the preceding generation, though, Bowen's perennial displacement issued less from a desire to occupy a center of culture and aesthetic innovation than from a dilemma of belonging that was built into Anglo-Irish identity. Owning an Irish estate, she said, was "something between a *raison d'être* and a predicament," and she suggested that she felt most at home at the midpoint of the ferry journey across the Irish Sea. But the ways in which Bowen's cosmopolitan mobility and untimeliness issue from a foundation in Anglo-Ireland makes that context an especially generative one; it enables all the others, is the one that her own work most extensively interrogates and relies upon, and infiltrates the formal features of her literary writing at its most engaged, contemporary and political—particularly that writing addressed to the Second World War—in ways that

have not been fully appreciated. Her two long works of the 1940s, *Bowen's Court* and *The Heat of the Day*, bracket the important middle period of her career, and they illustrate a unique confluence in Bowen's literary writing of Anglo-Irish institutionalism and the enabling conditions of wartime. In the historical moment just before the emergence of the postwar welfare state, these offered a stay against what she called "the dire period of Personal Life."[4]

In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell chronicles the emergence of "the one dominating form of modern understanding"—"an ironic one"— out of "the application of mind and memory to the events of the Great War."[5] "The Great War," Fussell writes, "was perhaps the last to be conceived as taking place within a seamless, purposeful 'history' involving a coherent stream of time running from past through present to future." Before the war, "values appeared stable, and . . . the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable" (19); afterward, all values had been called into question, and only a tragic sense of irony could make the experience comprehensible. In Fussell's account, the aesthetic response to the Great War was what subsequent generations came to know as High Modernism, including such figures as Eliot, Joyce, Pound, Kafka, Proust, Waugh, Auden, Huxley, Cummings, Lawrence, and Fitzgerald (23).

For Fussell's modernists, in a critical story that remains fundamental to any understanding of the Great War and the "Men of 1914," the War was experienced as a rupture in history and in the history of literary style, and rupture would seem to be the antithesis of the concept of the institution that I have traced in previous chapters. As

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[4] Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, 2nd ed. (New York: Ecco, 1978), 259.
[5] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), 36.

political scientist Hugh Heclo writes, to think in terms of institutions is to attend to the "faithful reception" of inherited ideas; to the "infusions of value" that accepted practices offer; and to the "lengthened time horizons" in which the life of the institution exceeds the life of any particular individual who might partake in it. "From inside the institutional worldview," Heclo writes, "one not only thinks about but is moved by a central fact—that there is something estimable that is larger than yourself and your immediate interests."[6] In contrast, the Great War put an end to the notion of a "coherent stream of time running from past through present to future." Yet war is a recurrent presence in the literary genealogy I have traced thus far through Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, and Mulk Raj Anand, in texts in which the relationship of war to the idea of the institution is quite differently inflected. In the Costaguana of Conrad's *Nostromo*, society's normal condition is war, understood not as a clash between nation-states but as civil conflict between material interests in an imperial world-system. While Woolf's works of the nineteen twenties, such as *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, incorporate the rupture of the Great War, in *The Years* the "soldier" North Pargiter returns to London not with shell shock but with a desire to find different forms of collective life: "to keep the emblems and tokens of North Pargiter . . . but at the same time spread out." In *Across the Black Waters*, Anand depicts the trauma of the Great War and the persistence of caste, class, and racial identity even as the novel models the fleeting potential for fairness, accountability, and democratization in modern institutions such as the imperial army. In these works, war is figured not as the eruptive other of modern institutions, but as something like institutions' unpredictable accompanist or familiar. War becomes a

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[6] Heclo, "Thinking Institutionally," *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, 736.

collective condition in which the accepted practices, habits, and values of institutional life are thrown into relief, modulated, and themselves re-infused with meaning, for better or for worse. As Elizabeth Bowen would write: "The values with which I set out—my own values—did, at least to my own feeling, remain constant: they were accentuated rather than changed by war."[7]

This varying but sustained vision of war and institutional continuity ties Bowen to Conrad, Woolf, and Anand at the same time that it marks her distance and theirs from Fussell's high modernists. War, for Bowen's characters, is in part a form of time itself, as in her novel of World War II, *The Heat of the Day*: "that 'time being' which war had made the very being of time. Wartime. . . . this tideless, hypnotic, futureless day-to-day."[8] In a 1950 essay titled "The Bend Back," on the uses of the past in literature, Bowen acknowledges that the Great War might best have been understood as rupture, writing that "confidence was broken by 1914. . . . After 1918, the artist, by general assent, took up the attitude of the critical exile, the psychologically displaced person."[9] But as the twentieth century went on, the Great War became merely "one war that War as we now know it encloses in its immense To-day."[10] Modernism, the literature of the Great War, "was to remain a literature of sensation only—cerebrally brilliant but skin-deep, ultimately bodiless in that it lacked soul." "Between the world's two wars," Bowen writes, "that literature ran its course"; it failed to "root down deeply in the imagination . .

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[7] Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, 453.
[8] Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (New York: Knopf, 1949), 109.
[9] Bowen, "The Bend Back," in *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Hermione Lee (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1986),
[10] Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, 437.

. mystery, loyalty, tenderness shriveled under its ray."[11] Bowen's demand for a literature attentive to "roots" and "loyalty" could "be met only by recourse to life in the past" ("The Bend Back," 55).

As this chapter will argue, the "time being" of war became for Bowen a portal through which "life in the past" could be enlisted to inform the literary representation of the experience of the present—in particular, the experience of the Second World War.[12] Bowen viewed herself as inheritor of a milieu that at a key moment in its history had approached life in terms of collective perpetuation rather than individual achievement, what Barbara Brothers calls "the Anglo-Irish tradition of a circumscribed family life within the history of which a social order was preserved that transcended the individual's experience of time."[13] Critics have most frequently found Anglo-Ireland figured in Bowen's work in the Big House, and in what she calls "the order, the form of life, the tradition" that accompanies it.[14] As a material structure joined to set of persistent practices, relatively indifferent to the specifics of the individuals who occupy it, the Big House emerges in Bowen's family history, *Bowen's Court*, and in related essays as the central figure for Bowen's concept of the institution. Bowen finds in the institutional life

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[11] Bowen, "The Bend Back," 54.

[12] Heather Bryant Jordan's *How Will the Heart Endure: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of War* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1992), a relatively early entry in the slowly growing collection of scholarly works devoted to Bowen, surveys Bowen's entire career in the context of the European and world wars that she lived through. Bryant's focus is feminist, and she argues convincingly that Bowen, who rejected the term "feminist" herself, nonetheless avidly pursued in her life and writing the expanded social possibilities for women that war helped to produce: "The perspectives imposed by war caused Bowen to take many more risks than she might otherwise have done, both in choice of subject and style. . . . The shifting and uncertain civilization she had inherited impelled her to paint her reactions on a far larger canvas than had she lived in a time of peace" (190-91). Other important feminist studies of Bowen include Phyllis Lassner, *Elizabeth Bowen* (Savage, MD: Barnes & Noble, 1989); and Hermione Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen: An Estimation* (London: Vision, 1981).

[13] Barbara Brothers, "Pattern and Void: Bowen's Irish Landscapes and *The Heat of the Day*," *Mosaic* 12:3 (1979): 130-31.

[14] Bowen, "The Big House," in *The Mulberry Tree*, 28-29.

of Anglo-Ireland a conservative spirit of impersonality and style, expressed in her literary writing through a distinct attention to the "stream of time running from past through present to future." The unique hybridity of the Anglo-Irish—always, in their history, already pulled between England and Ireland, between state power and civil society, and between the historical roles of European aristocracy and settler-colonial bourgeoisie—both enables this stylish and impersonal concept of the institution and makes it surprisingly exportable in fiction to quite foreign contexts, most notably the technocratic, cosmopolitan setting of World War II London, where it is reconstituted in the shadowy complex of institutions that make up the wartime state. Whether linked to the Big House or the intelligence service, Bowen's unusual forms of character come to fruition not in a desire to capture the precise workings of the institution in narrative, but rather in a commitment to exploring the forms of behavior—beautiful, stylish, courageous, exciting—to which politics is largely incidental and that are enabled by the impersonality of institutional life. Bowen's novel *The Heat of the Day*, written during the war and published in 1948, depicts a world in which human relationships are mediated to a great extent through wartime institutions—institutions that, because of the atmosphere of secrecy that pervades the novel's plot and setting and infiltrates the very rhythms of its prose, come to seem nonetheless impossible to describe with any specificity. The novel's crypto-institutionalism thus speaks to the residual persistence of the Anglo-Irish *ancien régime* in literary form, grafting Bowen's apparently age-old institutional aesthetic of style and impersonality onto a putatively hypermodern milieu to produce highly abstract forms of character. At the same time, *The Heat of the Day*'s retreat from the representation of specific institutions is also a retreat from the aspiration to capture social

totality that is pursued by other works I have addressed. And finally, the hybrid aristocratic formation that generates Bowen's concept of institutional life as style and impersonality also generates a limit to that concept as it comes into contact with the emergent postwar welfare state, which lends different content to the relationship between the individual and the institution.

I. ANGLO-IRISH IMPERSONALITY

Bowen's Court is easily Bowen's longest work, a testament to its ambitiousness. That Jonathan Cape, Bowen's regular publisher, refused to publish during wartime this seemingly anodyne work of history and biography because of its "controversial" treatment of the Ireland-England relationship is testament to the force with which that relationship remained, in 1942, suffused by the past.[15] *Bowen's Court* traces 350 years in the life of a family and 200 in the life of a house, both products of the complex history of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. The "English," in the form of French-speaking subjects of Henry II, had been in Ireland since the twelfth century, when they arrived as soldiers at the invitation of certain Gaelic kings; these "Old English," as those who stayed would come to be called, largely retained Catholicism after the Reformation along with a nonetheless persistent sense of being set apart from the Gaelic (and Catholic) Irish. With the establishment of Protestant settlement in the early seventeenth century, tensions arose between Old English and Protestant "New English" arrivals, which broke to the fore in the Ulster Rebellion of 1641. Old English and native Irish nobles, acting, they claimed, as

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[15] See Jordan, *How Will the Heart Endure*, 114, who cites a letter from John Hayward to Frank Morley. Hayward was a London literary figure; Morley was at the time editor-in-chief of Harcourt Brace in the United States.

loyal subjects of Charles I (that is as Irish Catholics claiming fealty to a Protestant English king), sought to overthrow the Protestant lords of the Ulster plantation. Cromwell's armies would arrive in 1649 and crush them decisively. The lands of the Catholic lords who had led the rebellion were given over to Protestant officers who accompanied Cromwell and to the financiers who had backed his army. This created a wealthy Protestant landowning class sitting atop a not-inconsiderable population of ordinary Protestant settlers, native converts to Protestantism, and the mass of native Catholic Irish. This Protestant Ascendancy reached the apex of its cultural, political, and economic power in the eighteenth century, peaking with the Irish Parliament and the Constitution of 1782. This Irish nation was a Protestant nation, nominally self-governing and loyal to the Crown; Catholics were excluded from the establishment. The Act of Union in 1800 dissolved the Irish Parliament, brought English troops to the country on a permanent basis, and put Irish governance in the hands of Parliament in England, giving the lie to the notion that Irish Parliamentarians had represented a whole Irish nation rather than a mere "English garrison."[16] Structurally isolated, retaining economic power but with dwindling political capital, Anglo-Irish landowners as a class declined slowly throughout the nineteenth century, until the nationalist historian Standish O'Grady could describe them in 1901, in memorable if perhaps not wholly just terms, as "rotting from the land in the most dismal farce-tragedy of all time, without one

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[16] On the "English garrison" see J. C. Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1976), 87-89. Beckett's book is itself a historical defense of the Anglo-Irish, and the complexities of the Anglo-Irish position in Ireland and in the broader structure of the British Empire are captured in his discussion of the term "English garrison": "If the Irish Protestants [after 1800] were in truth a garrison, they were a garrison in peculiar and difficult circumstances. . . . They had neither means nor authority to organize their own defence. . . . They had no power to come to terms on their own behalf; but they lived in constant fear that terms would be arranged behind their backs; that a vital outwork might suddenly be surrendered; and even that, sooner or later, the whole fortress would be abandoned and they themselves left to their fate" (88).

brave word."[17] With the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922, seventeen years before Bowen began writing *Bowen's Court*, their obsolescence was assured.

Even this brief overview of Anglo-Ireland suggests the many crossed allegiances and hyphenated designations that would come to be built into Anglo-Irish self-understanding. *Bowen's Court* traces this history, from Cromwell onward, as it was lived by the Bowens themselves, though the significance of the individual Bowens ultimately lies in their role as a relay between the collective life of Anglo-Ireland and the house in which its values are instantiated; as Bowen writes, "If I did not show what went to make the Bowens, from the time of their first coming to Ireland, I should fail to show what went to make Bowen's Court" (32). Family patriarchs are lent somewhat tongue-in-cheek dynastic titles: from Colonel Bowen (Henry I), who came to Ireland from Wales, to Henry III, who finished building Bowen's Court in 1776, to Bowen's own father Henry VI (Johns and Roberts also appear).[18] Strictly speaking, the term "Anglo-Irish" itself could refer to either Catholics or Protestants who came to Ireland from England over a period of hundreds of years. In this respect, that Bowen treats her family as typically Anglo-Irish is itself significant, as the term silently contracts in her use to treat the specific class-fraction that is at the center of the story she tells: W. B. Yeats's "hard-

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[17] O'Grady, *Selected Essays and Passages* (Dublin, 1918), 180. The legacy of the Anglo-Irish remains a topic of debate, particularly in Ireland itself, but it is worth briefly noting that despite the shorthand tendency to conceive of Irish history in terms of native Catholic Irish and colonizing Protestant British groups, the reality is considerably more complicated. To take one prominent example: W. B. Yeats, John Millington Synge, and Lady Gregory, founders of the Abbey Theatre and key figures in the Irish Literary Revival, were all products of various tiers of the moneyed Protestant class.

[18] In *Bowen's Court*, Bowen recounts the family legend of how their land was acquired. Colonel Bowen "loved his hawks and hawking, doubted God and cared almost nothing for man" (*BC*, 36). Called before Cromwell to discuss some military matter, he was distracted by the bird he carried on his arm, at which point Cromwell, in a fit of rage at being ignored, wrung its neck. Colonel Bowen, having sometime later either reformed or become notable enough to be reckoned with, received an apology and was granted as much land as one of his other hawks would fly over. See *Bowen's Court,* 67-69.

riding country gentlemen," descendants of the Protestants who came with Cromwell and became significant landowners, acquiring wealth but who, having taken over the land, "had still no *idea* of living to integrate them."[19] In Bowen's account, the need to construct an "idea of living" drove the Anglo-Irish to develop a particularly sustaining and valuable notion of the institution.

The construction of that idea begins, in Bowen's account, ignominiously. "For some time," Bowen writes, "many Cromwellians remained squatters, busied with the accumulation of wealth but living . . . in patched-up ruins, in the tedium and squalor of poor whites" (87). Colonel Bowen came to Ireland alone, leaving the children of his second marriage, along with his third wife and the children of that marriage, in Wales; when his wife attempted to visit him, he sent her back. He lived "in the small semi-ruinous castle just across the Farahy stream; just *off*—by the width of the water—his own lands" (74). In the only Gothic flourish in an account that largely rejects the Gothic conventions of standard Big House narratives, Bowen tells the story of "the Apparition" as recorded in Richard Baxter's *Worlds of Spirits* (1691): Colonel Bowen, having acquired a reputation as "an absolute Atheist, denying Heaven or Hell, God or Devil"

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[19] Yeats, "Under Ben Bulben," *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Alt and R. K. Alspach (London: MacMillan, 1973), 638. Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, 87. An oft-quoted and less flattering, though quite nuanced, definition of the Anglo-Irish is offered by the Irish working-class playwright Brendan Behan in *The Hostage* (New York: Grove, 1958):

> Pat: He was an Anglo-Irishman.
> Meg: In the name of God, what's that?
> Pat: A Protestant with a horse.
> Ropeen: Leadbetter.
> Pat: No, no, an ordinary Protestant like Leadbetter, the plumber in the back parlour next door, won't do, nor a Belfast orangeman, not if he was as black as your boot.
> Meg: Why not?
> Pat: Because they work. An Anglo-Irishman only works at riding horses, drinking whiskey, and reading double-meaning books in Irish at Trinity College. (11)

(43), appeared (while still alive in Ireland) to his wife back in Wales as a ghastly apparition, blaspheming and smelling "of a Carcase some-while dead" (45). His son John I and the two succeeding generations, having through strenuous application put the living-dead tendencies of the Colonel behind them, occupied small houses built in or around Kilbolane Castle, miles from the Bowen lands, with the Nicholls family, into which John I had married and to whom he became heavily indebted. Only with Henry III, the eventual builder of Bowen's Court, does the institutionalization of the Anglo-Irish come into focus.

Henry III was "the first Irish Bowen to come to full bloom" (145). He was not, Bowen is at pains to stress, an intellectual man; he had no formal education besides tutors as a child. "I detect in his nature," Bowen writes, "a mixture of pride and timidity. . . . He would not stand as a stranger at anyone's—no, not at King George's—door. He posed himself here in Mallow, in the rich positiveness of a provincial society" (145). This "positiveness" was largely the absence of self-doubt; in the 1750s, Anglo-Ireland was "at the vital, growing, magnetic stage: it enjoyed not only material but real psychological dominance" (130). It "took itself for granted; there was no need, yet, to say, 'We are the people!' . . . they *were* the people" (thought Bowen is quick to note that, by contrast, "the poor had to flatter to live—and, even so, most of them barely lived at all") (131). In this period of Anglo-Irish hegemony, the edge had come off religion; wealthier Catholics integrated or conformed, and just enough of the intellectual ferment taking place on the Continent filtered through to places like Mallow, County Cork, to make possible the belief "that God was not after one the *whole* time" (131). Books were present, as part of a gentleman's home furnishings, but were probably not read, according to Bowen; horses,

entertaining, and large numbers of servants were the primary expenses. Henry III could excel through his "flair for living, his innate stylishness, and his love of the grand":

> The pleasures of the mind, the arts, discourse were all denied to Henry III—one can hardly say denied, for he never demanded them. His destiny was, to be a *beau* in Mallow society, a liberal landowner, the builder of Bowen's Court. Did he miss much? He lived his life to the full. . . . Henry, a pre-eminently social figure, lived in a Philistine, snobbish, limited and on the whole pretty graceless society. But he got somewhere, and lived to die in his drawing-room surrounded by hosts of children and the esteem of what looked like a lasting order. (124-25)

This is the peak of Bowen's Anglo-Ireland: "Philistine," "snobbish," "limited," and "graceless," redeemed primarily by "hosts of children" and the concept of "a lasting order." As the passage continues, though, this seemingly mixed judgment is refined as it is brought into relation with the present, in one of the few explicit linkages between the history presented in *Bowen's Court* and the moment of its composition: by contrast with that "limited" world, Bowen asks, "to what did our fine feelings, our regard for the arts, our intimacies, our inspiring conversations, our wish to be clear of the bonds of sex and class and nationality, our wish to try to be fair to every one bring us? To 1939" (125). The ambiguous tone of the conclusion, and the questionable validity of its judgment, should not obscure the curious movement of the passage as a whole.[20] The subject of

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[20] It is difficult to say whether Bowen is entirely serious in the passage's conclusion, which produces a kind of reverse bathos as it offers an opinion that seems nonetheless to be Bowen's own. Lee refers to Bowen's "complexity of tone, in which regret and parody rub shoulders," which captures something of the

each sentence is a "he," the passage is silent about Henry III's motives, desires, thoughts or feelings presenting him instead in terms of the roles he occupies: *beau*, landowner, builder, social figure. Outlining the society of Henry III's time by subtracting from his subjectivity, the passage then contrasts its positive appraisal of this externalized personality with the evident failure of a modernity overstuffed with "feelings," "regard," "intimacies," "conversations," and "wishes." In doing so it begins to offer a frame for Bowen's institutional thinking in *Bowen's Court*.

One way that the passage does this is in indexing the value of the Anglo-Irish idea of living as Bowen reconstructs it, demonstrating that this value has little to do with anything that might be called Anglo-Irish *culture*. By contrast, Yeats, their most prominent re-imaginer, mounts a case for Anglo-Irish greatness on the strength of Anglo-Irish literary and philosophical production. As Bernard McKenna argues, "For Yeats, cultural nationalism had the potential to unite the nation under the leadership of the Anglo-Irish."[21] In his introduction to Hone and Rossi's *Bishop Berkeley*, Yeats writes:

> Born in such a community, Berkeley with his belief in perception, that abstract ideas are mere words, Swift with his love of perfect nature, of the Houynhnhnms, his disbelief in Newton's system, and every sort of machine, Goldsmith and his delight in the particulars of common life that shocked his contemporaries, Burke with his conviction that all States not grown slowly like a forest tree are

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strangeness of these lines, though they seem odder still when considering that "1939" refers to the calamity of the world war whose effects Bowen was directly experiencing in London at the time she wrote. Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen: An Estimation*, 18.

[21] Bernard McKenna, "Yeats, *On the Boiler*, the Aesthetics of Cultural Disintegration and the Program for Renewal 'of our own rich experience'," *Journal of Modern Literature* 35.4 (2012): 73.l

> tyrannies, found in England the opposite that stung their own thought into expression and made it lucid.[22]

Yeats's account is strongly "cultural" in both primary senses of the term: Ireland as "a community" (the sense of what Raymond Williams calls "culture as a whole way of life") produces writers whose works are "genius" (402)—high culture, the best that has been thought and said.[23] The Irish eighteenth century thus birthed a culture uniquely suited to producing culture: "Its mind"—that of Ireland itself—"became so clear that it changed the world" (411). Seamus Deane argues that "this particular version of eighteenth-century literary and intellectual history is manifestly absurd. . . . Yeats misreads Berkeley and Swift, makes Goldsmith appear far more eccentric and controversial than he actually was, attributes to England a role in Burke's thought which really belongs to France." As Deane suggests, Yeats's construction of an Anglo-Irish culture is less an exercise in history than in Romantic aesthetics, "making history palatable by imaging it as a version of the personality."[24] Deane's forceful debunking nevertheless shows Yeats to be engaged in a project of national justification via the assertion of literary value that has

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[22] William Butler Yeats, "Bishop Berkeley," in *Essays and Introductions* (New York: MacMillan, 1961), 402.

[23] Williams

[24] Seamus Deane, "The Literary Myths of the Revival," in *Celtic Revivals* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), 29, 32. Deane briefly links Bowen to Yeats, suggesting that Yeats's "transposition of the political theory of aristocracy into the realm of literature" (31) informs a swath of twentieth-century Irish writing, including Bowen's *The Last September*, that Deane summarizes as concerned with "The Big House surrounded by the unruly tenantry, Culture besieged by barbarity, a refined aristocracy beset by a vulgar middle class" (31). This reductive characterization of the novel overlooks the self-conscious irony that pervades *The Last September*'s depiction of the Anglo-Irish, whom the novel portrays as a class almost helplessly out of sync with the times and at the mercy of political circumstance. On this irony, see Maria DiBattista, "Elizabeth Bowen's Troubled Modernism," *Modernism and Colonialism*, eds. Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2007), 226-245. Indeed, the novel is significantly less optimistic than *Bowen's Court* about what might be salvaged from Anglo-Ireland. Deane's palpable distaste for Anglo-Irish mythmaking is highly instructive in the case of Yeats, but his essay does not allow for the possibility that writers like Bowen may have found alternate, even if still suspect, forms of value in looking back on Anglo-Ireland.

become ever more recognizable in the wake of postcolonial studies and recent critical discourse on world literature—even if, in Yeats's case, the partiality of that justification is particularly legible. Yeats's cultural romanticism thus highlights Bowen's relative indifference to Anglo-Irish intellectual production and her emphasis instead on what is enabled by that society's "Philistinism," "snobbishness," and "limits." As Neil Corcoran notes, Bowen repeatedly asserts the importance of a "style of living," and yet "very strangely, virtually no instances of Anglo-Irish cultural, as opposed to purely social, achievement, are ever adduced."[25] Bowen says almost nothing about the art, philosophy, or literature of the Anglo-Irish, and while Corcoran gestures toward the strangeness of this fact, the passage above suggests that more than simple omission is at work; the continuous "lasting order" that is the fruit of Anglo-Ireland is possible not despite but because of that society's "limited" ambit. (Henry III is reminiscent of Conrad's Singleton, the elemental sailor of *The Nigger of the Narcissus*: "Singleton with an education is impossible . . . he would become conscious—and much smaller—and very unhappy.")[26] Much later in the chronology of *Bowen's Court,* Bowen suggests that Victorian Anglo-Ireland "looked for culture everywhere but inside her home shores," commenting that "the Gaelic League seemed no more than a bizarre activity on the part of the son of a clergyman" (399). And the conclusion of the above passage emphasizes culture's inadequacy to the task of sustaining a "lasting order" through the caustic irony of Bowen's shift to the present, in which "our" modern cosmopolitan culture has brought us inexorably "to 1939."

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[25] Neil Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), 25.
[26] Conrad to Cunningham Graeme

If the literature of Yeats's great men allows him to imagine history as culture and thus as a version of the personality, the typicality of Henry III allows Bowen to find in history an institutional form of *impersonality*.[27] In her 1940 essay "The Big House," composed as she was writing *Bowen's Court*, Bowen writes, "The idea from which these houses sprang was, before everything, a social one. . . . What is fine about the social idea is that it means the subjugation of the personal to the impersonal."[28] Bowen sketches these impersonal values as "wit, knowledge, sympathy or personal beauty"—"the best (everyone) had"; Victoria Glendinning sums up Bowen's impersonal "social idea" as "stylishness, vanity, discipline, energy, lack of cant, independence, courage."[29] In *Bowen's Court* Bowen explicitly contrasts these values and the impersonality developed by the Anglo-Irish in the eighteenth century with the "Personal Life" that succeeds it: with the Act of Union in 1800, "Society . . . was on the decline; it was breaking up. . . . the main healthy abstract was gone. And with this break-up of society there set in the dire period we are not yet out of, the dire period of Personal Life" (*BC*, 259). Accordingly, *Bowen's Court* is less concerned with the personalities of Bowen's forebears than might at first be apparent. While chapters are headed by the names of Bowen patriarchs, their pseudo-monarchical titles produce the effect of differentiation without distinction: names (Henry I, John I, Henry II, and so on) become indicators of mere historical chronology

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[27] In a late fragment of autobiography, Bowen does offer an account of Anglo-Irish cultural achievement that is explicitly indebted to that of Yeats: "Bravado," she writes, "characterizes much Irish, all Anglo-Irish writing: gloriously it is sublimated by Yeats. . . . As beings we are at once brilliant and limited; our unbeatables, up to now, accordingly, have been those who best profited by that: Goldsmith, Sheridan, Wilde, Shaw, Beckett" (Bowen, "Pictures and Conversations," in *The Mulberry Tree,* 276). Bowen, however, maintains an emphasis on Anglo-Irish constraints ("we are . . limited"), and unlike Yeats, draws only two of her exemplars from the eighteenth century. What is most significant for Bowen about the height of Anglo-Irish power in her post-*Bowen's Court* writing is not the culture it produced.
[28] Bowen, "The Big House," in *The Mulberry Tree*, 29.
[29] Bowen, "The Big House," 29; Glendinning, 201.

rather than of unique individuals. Additional designations—Henry I is "the Colonel," Henry III is "the Builder" (32, 125)—reinforce this typicality rather than adding characterological depth. Bowen emphasizes that capturing the individual psychologies of her ancestors is not her aim: "I accepted the ignorance, set up by time and death, that divided my ancestors' conscious lives from mine. In the writing of this book, sheer information would not have taken me very much of the way—only a little displaced by my researches, the greater part of that ignorance still remains: it is natural" (452). And at times, Bowen doubly distances herself from the rendering of interior states by relying not just on typical description but on *other authors*' typical description: "Henry (III)," she writes, "was in no sense 'an original': his traits of mind, his notions, his ways of living were so much those of his class that I think I can do no better than quote from Arthur Young's rather tart note . . . on the Irish country gentry" (170). But Young's "tart note" only adds yet another layer of remove, as it confines itself to the cost of food in Ireland, horses and servants, and table manners. In the case of Henry V, Bowen writes, "His career at Trinity College, Dublin, is outside my power to pursue"; instead, she posits that his experience of Dublin was analogous to that of "Miss Edgeworth's Lord Colambre" (281), citing several paragraphs from *The Absentee* to this effect.[30] Through titles, types, and literary pastiche, *Bowen's Court* hollows out the representation of the creative individual personality and dispenses with the forms of culture associated with it by Yeats, in favor of an account of the construction of an impersonal "idea of living" composed of collective values and embodied in the infrastructure of the Big House.

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[30] Lee traces the many novelistic parallels to aspects of *Bowen's Court*; see *Elizabeth Bowen: An Estimation*, 34-42.

Indeed, *Bowen's Court* is at times quite explicit about this attempt to reconceive the Anglo-Irish legacy. A thematic emphasis on the absence of human agency throughout *Bowen's Court* combines with the prominence of types and citationality, displacing the individual Bowens themselves from the center of the account, and setting up an opposition between conscious character and the unconscious action of an institution realizing itself in a material structure: as Maud Ellman writes, "Everything in Bowen's prose conspires to efface the human subject."[31] Henry III's attributes include his "flair for living" and "love of the grand," but Bowen maintains that "Henry the big boy, the naïve chatterer, the coaxing, loving and rather childish husband was not present in the building of Bowen's Court. The stern and cold force of his unconscious nature perpetuated itself in stone as the house went up. . . . He was more than building a home, he was setting a pattern" (169). The traits attributed to Henry as an individual are removed from consideration of how the house was made; only the impersonal aspects of his "unconscious nature," features that are "so much those of his class," inform the "pattern." Bowen emphasizes that "a Bowen, in the first place, made Bowen's Court. Since then, with a rather alarming sureness, Bowen's Court has made all the succeeding Bowens" (32); but neither is this first Bowen revealed to be an independent agent. Instead, Henry III, like "all the succeeding Bowens," is himself an expression of the impersonal and unconscious effects of the practices, habits and values of the Anglo-Irish institution. In her 1964 afterword to the second edition of *Bowen's Court*—itself an important document that justifies Bowen's method, traces the history of the house through Bowen's

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[31] Maud Ellman, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadow Across the Page* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2004), 67.

ownership, and recounts its ultimate demise—she revisits and elaborates on the relationship between her ancestors and the historical institution she seeks to narrate:

> What runs on most through a family living in one place is a continuous, semi-physical dream. Above this dream-level lives show their tips, their little conscious formations of will and thought. With the end of each generation, the lives that submerged here were absorbed again. . . .
>
> It is the involuntary, or spontaneous, aspect that interests me most. Having looked back at [the Bowens] steadily, I begin to notice, if I cannot define, the pattern they unconsciously went to make. And I can see that that pattern has its relation to the outside more definite pattern of history.
>
> The Bowens' relation to history was an unconscious one. . . . Their assertions, their compliances, their refusals as men and women went, year by year, generation by generation, to give history direction, as well as colour and stuff. Each of the family, in their different ways, were more than their time's products; they were its agents. (451-452)

This passage offers a progressively deepening account of the relationship between the individual and institutional life. It first asserts the aristocratic vision of continuity underlying the ideal of "a family living in one place," reaffirming the primacy of the "unconscious" collective relationship to history over the individual lives whose significance Bowen minimizes by terming them "little conscious formations of will and

thought." The passage then turns to the "pattern" that is most notably embodied in Henry III's construction of the house, an event resulting less from Henry III's distinctive personality than from his typification of the features of his class and "the pattern of history," setting up the specificity of the context in which the Bowens' "assertions," "compliances," and "refusals" take place and acquire substance—"colour" and "stuff." This is the language of institutional character, capturing the ways that the institution constrains individual action but at the same time lends it meaning. *Bowen's Court* does not imagine a world devoid of important individuals, of course, nor does it conceive of the "pattern" established by institutional life as static; but it insists on the relative insignificance, over time, of the details of the individual personality, and it presents institutional change as a product of historical forces, and of choices made within the bounds of the institution itself. Hence the precision of Bowen's language in the final sentence of the passage, which does not oppose absolute freedom to absolute constraint, but does something subtler: to be more than a "product" of one's time, Bowen suggests, is to be its "agent"—a term that implies both a capacity for action ("agency") and external constraint (one is the agent *of* some other entity). Bowen thus acknowledges the constraints on individual expression imposed by institutional life even as institutions become something more than vehicles of social control; they become the place where the social is produced. One's being an agent is particularly resonant in *The Heat of the Day*, whose characters are indeed all secret agents. In *Bowen's Court*, though, it serves to put a fine point on the extent to which the text constantly works to emphasize the impersonal, collective, and institutional components of character.

The embodiment of the Anglo-Irish institution, for Bowen, is the Big House. She notes "the rule that I have tried, in this book, to keep—the rule of not leaving Bowen's Court for more than a page or two" (392), and unlike the Bowens themselves, Bowen's Court itself is drawn with a high degree of clarity. The first chapter of *Bowen's Court* is largely given over to careful description of the house itself, beginning with the countryside and neighboring towns and growing more focused as it presents the exterior of the house, the various gardens and outbuildings, and a room-by-room account of the layout and furnishings:

> Bowen's Court, finished in 1776, is a high bare Italianate house. It was intended to form a complete square, but the north-east corner is missing. Indoors, the plan is simple; the rooms are large, lofty and few. The house stands three stories high, with, below, a basement sunk in an area. Outside the front door a terrace, supported on an unseen arch, bridges the area; from this terrace the steps descend to the gravel sweep. (21).

Bowen emphasizes the simplicity and formality of the Bowen's Court throughout the passages devoted to it, and the clarity of description in this section contrasts with the vagueness and relative superficiality of the language used to discuss individuals. This ordered, transparent writing seems to reflect the form of the house itself and the values institutionalized there, as if conditioned by its subject in the way that the house's inhabitants are conditioned by it: "One must accustom oneself, wherever one settles down, to much space behind one's back, much height over one's head. There are no nooks. Oddly, perhaps, the effect of this is not restless; it is compelling and calm. Steady

behavior of *some* sort, even formality, is enjoined by every line of the house" (26). In "The Bend Back," Bowen writes that "the reader, led into an unfamiliar region of time, must have a key to his whereabouts slipped to him—as unostentatiously as possible" (56), and in this context, the intentional lucidity of Bowen's description becomes an extension of style into the past, an attempt to embody in the prose itself the "social idea" of the historical moment of the house's completion. But this clarity has a more immediate, contemporary import as well, as Bowen writes: "I want Bowen's Court to be taken as existing, and to be seen as clearly as possible" (32)—insisting, in a notably direct tone, on the centrality of the house's continued existence, and juxtaposing a prose style that seeks to embody historic formality with an emphasis on the present significance of the object of description. Thus the passage anticipates the later comparison of Henry III's "philistine" society with "1939," bringing not only disparate times but also disparate senses of temporality—the stylish, impersonal institution that transcends the individual experience of time; the "time being" of war—into close proximity. The past is not called upon to sit in judgment of the present, but to inhabit the present, in the enduring figure of the house, in a way that vivifies both.

Ultimately, though, the formalism of Bowen's institutional thinking is such that she envisions the practices and values that she valorizes as persisting even past the lifetime of the house that had seemed so central to them. This, at least, is the suggestion of the afterword to *Bowen's Court*, which tells how, facing financial ruin, Bowen sold the house in 1959 to a neighboring farmer, who ultimately tore it down. In the last lines, addressing the reader directly, Bowen writes:

> Knowing, as you now do, that the house is no longer there, you may wonder why I have left my opening chapter, the room-to-room description of Bowen's Court, in the present tense. I can only say that *I* saw no reason to transpose it into the past. There is a sort of perpetuity about livingness, and it is part of the character of Bowen's Court to be, in sometimes its silent way, very much alive. (459)

In part this passage reflects the impermanence that overtook the once reassuringly solid Big Houses, hundreds of which were destroyed in the Irish Civil War. Earlier in the text, Bowen recounts that, after the burning of three neighboring houses in the spring of 1921, "I . . . taught myself to imagine Bowen's Court in flames" (440), but, in the event, the house's end turns out to be less traumatic; it simply "is no longer there."[32] Indeed, not only is the trauma of destruction effaced, but it is as though the house had not been destroyed at all, as Bowen's (perhaps faux-naïve) declaration begins to suggest: "*I* saw no reason to transpose it into the past." The house is "very much alive," and the final sentences suggest that the significance of Bowen's Court, and of *Bowen's Court*, lies not in the physical structure of the house, so carefully delineated hundreds of pages (and twenty years) previous, but in the house's "livingness," a nonce-term that evokes the Anglo-Irish "form of life" that the text records and theorizes.

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[32] Corcoran adds an interesting footnote to the history of Bowen's Court: "When I made a program about Elizabeth Bowen for BBC Radio 3 in 1998, I interviewed people in Farahy and Kildorerry and was told that, while Elizabeth was in London, the local branch of the IRA—some of whose members worked, or had worked, in the house—took a vote *in the house itself* about whether to burn it. The vote was, of course, not to do so" (25n9). Exactly when this might have occurred is an object for speculation, as Bowen herself notes that she was in Italy when the neighboring houses were burned (see *BC*, 440), and her absence would not have implied that the house was vacant; Henry Bowen ("Henry VI"), her father, would presumably have been either at the house or in Dublin throughout the 1920s.

Thus Bowen's afterword presents a reading of the body text of *Bowen's Court* that emphasizes the impersonal and shared aspects of the "social idea" that finds expression in Anglo-Irish collective life as embodied in the Big House. It offers a retrospective comment, twenty-two years after the book's initial publication, on the relationship between the immaterial, formal features of the Anglo-Irish institution—impersonality, style, courage, wit —and the physical reality of Bowen's Court. Critics have tended to run these two components of Bowen's social vision together, treating the house and the institutional form of life that Bowen grounds in it as essentially one presence in her work; as Vera Kreilkamp asserts, in an influential reading, "The emblematic Anglo-Irish Big House, or diminished versions of it, hovers before her characters, yet repeatedly fails them."[33] But in bringing the biography of the house to an end, the afterword to *Bowen's Court* suggests a quite different understanding. As its closing sentences note that the house "is no longer there" even as they insist on the "perpetuity" of its "livingness," they work to disarticulate the immaterial aspects of the institution from their primary physical embodiment. Thus to suggest as Ellman does that "in *Bowen's Court*, architecture shapes personality" (66) is to overlook part of the story; infrastructure is not the whole of the institution, and to the extent that the Big House is for Bowen a vehicle for a set of practices, habits, and values, these last lines suggest that it is not the only possible vehicle. Bowen's Court itself, after all, might be termed sufficient but not necessary to the stylish, impersonal form of life whose development

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[33] Vera Kreilkamp, *The Anglo-Irish Novel and the Big House* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1998), 142.

Bowen's Court traces around and into it.[34] The Big House and domestic spaces indebted to it appear throughout Bowen's fiction, giving rise to a recurrent critical tendency to read *Bowen's Court* alongside Bowen's novel of the Troubles, *The Last September*, as the two texts that most overtly reflect on the fate of the Big House as a historical fact.[35] But the afterlife of Anglo-Irish impersonality, I will argue, structures and informs more deeply *The Heat of the Day*, a novel about "a time when all homes were threatened" (*BC*, 454).

II. CRYPTOINSTITUTIONALISM IN *THE HEAT OF THE DAY*

For Stella Rodney, Bowen's heroine in *The Heat of the Day*, the coming of war is "an opportunity to make a break, to free herself of her house, to come to London to work" (24). Stella married and divorced young; her ex-husband died soon after, and her only child is now, in September of 1942, in the Army. But she has fashioned a new life for herself:

> In the years between the wars she had travelled, had for intervals lived abroad: she now qualified by knowing two or three languages, two or three countries, well—having had some idea what she might most usefully do she had, still better, known whom to ask to support her application to do it. She had in her background relations, connections and at least former friends. She

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[34] An April 1934 letter from Virginia Woolf to Vanessa Bell somewhat humorously reinforces the idea that architecture has less to do with the set of institutional values presented in *Bowen's Court*. Of a visit to the house, Woolf writes, "The remarkable thing about Ireland is that. . . . There is no architecture of any kind . . . so Elizabeths home was merely a great stone box . . . however they insisted upon keeping up a ramshackle kind of state, dressing for dinner and so on." Woolf, *Letters* 5:229.

[35] See, for example, Ellman, Kreilkamp, and Lee.

> was now therefore employed, in an organisation better called Y.X.D., in secret, exacting, not unimportant work, to which the European position since 1940 gave ever-increasing point. The habit of guardedness was growing on her, as on many other people, reinforcing what was in her an existing bent: she never had asked much, from dislike of being in turn asked. Or, could that have been circumstance?—for by temperament she was communicative and fluctuating. Generous and spirited, to a fault not unfeeling, she was not wholly admirable; but who is?

The passage concludes the novel's introduction to Stella, which, for several paragraphs, proceeds in straightforward descriptive prose, beginning with her physical appearance and concluding with these notes on her recent history and current occupation. "Younger by a year or two than the century," she has a "charming" face, "grey" eyes, and a "pale, fine, soft," complexion, made "striking" only by a single lock of white hair "springing back from her forehead" (23-24). Highlighting her world's difference from that of *Bowen's Court*, the cited passage opens by noting that Stella has "freed herself of her house"; what she has replaced it with, as the passage progresses, becomes increasingly difficult to define, and in contrast to her physical description, components of Stella's character are confidently asserted by Bowen's narrator only to fall into generalization or to be withdrawn. She "now qualified by knowing two or three languages, two or three countries, well," but we are not told—nor will we be, in the course of the narrative—exactly what she is qualified for or what languages and countries she knows. Likewise, "what she might most usefully do" and "whom she might ask" will remain largely empty

categories, defined respectively as "secret, exacting, not unimportant work" and "relations, connections," and the peculiar category of "at least former friends." The narrator's near-passive-aggressive evasiveness aside, we are told that Stella works for "an organisation better called Y.X.D." (but better than what?), and the pseudonymous abbreviation and the secrecy of her work there implicate Y.X.D. in the production of the first positive characteristic attributed to her: her "guardedness."[36] Yet again, a lack of clarity persists: the "organisation" either "reinforces" an "existing bent" or fully generates her guardedness over against her pre-existent "communicative and fluctuating" nature.

The knotted prose of the passage, then, finally yields an assurance that Stella's guardedness is in some way a product of the anonymous institution, Y.X.D., which distributes this trait across the individuals of which it is composed; but this purely formal assurance is combined with total ambiguity with regard to her innate "temperament": prior to this, did she "never ask much" or was she "communicative and fluctuating"? The novel will never resolve this question. Nor does guardedness itself make Stella particularly distinctive: it "was growing on her, as on many other people." Thus, what purports to be a sketch of an individual undoes itself as it is drawn. It first offers empty placeholders for Stella's background, job, and relationships: she speaks "languages," has visited "countries," knows three indistinct categories of people, and is "employed, in . . . work." It then devolves into the outright contradictions and double negatives that

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[36] Allan Hepburn discusses what he terms "this remote relation between narrator and character" in Bowen's writing in his "French Translations: Elizabeth Bowen and the idea of Character," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 79 (2010): 1058. Hepburn argues that Bowen looked to French novelists for examples of unsympathetic relationships between narrators and characters, and especially to Gustave Flaubert, Henri de Montherlant, Guy de Maupassant, and Marcel Proust.

Jacqueline Rose identifies in Bowen as producing characterological traits "with one hand, and then tak[ing] them back syntactically with the other."[37] Offering one account, the narrator suddenly offers the opposite with "Or . . . ?"; in a slightly different way, Stella is "Generous and spirited, to a fault not unfeeling," but these qualities that are then rendered contiguous, rather than in tension, with her being "not wholly admirable."

Stella may be freed from her house, but these suggestive passages echo *Bowen's Court* in at least two ways, while looking forward to the earlier text's 1964 Afterword. They recall *Bowen's Court* at the level of style by condensing into a few paragraphs the shift from deliberate, transparent descriptive sentences to contradictory and syntactically self-consuming constructions that in *Bowen's Court* span many pages, beginning with clarity in rendering the house itself and concluding in the appended Afterword with the abstruse formulation of a "perpetuity about livingness." More specifically, the passages recall how character works in *Bowen's Court*, where traits that initially appear to be qualities of (for example) Henry III as a distinct person are in actuality aspects of the Anglo-Irish social idea. As the contradictions and double negatives accumulate in *The Heat of the Day*'s description of Stella, the passage directs our attention back to the relative solidity of the "organisation" Y.X.D., the proximate cause of her and others' guardedness. But whereas in *Bowen's Court* the Big House is presented at length as a clearly delineated material structure that serves as a vehicle for the cultivation of impersonal values, Y.X.D. remains undefined. That it is a wartime institution of the British state there is no doubt, but its secrecy and importance, embodied in the "guardedness" of its constituent individuals, are all that can be known about it. Even its

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[37] Jacqueline Rose, "Bizarre Objects: Mary Butts and Elizabeth Bowen," *Critical Quarterly* 42.1 (2003): 81.

name is not its own: the apparently random letters Y.X.D. could stand in for any of the three-character designations that proliferated in the institutional landscape of World War II Britain (SIS, SOE, MI5, RAF)—indeed, this is the point. Y.X.D. comes to stand in the novel less for a particular institution than for the entire complex of more or less shadowy departments and bureaus that structured wartime life in London for all who remained there as participants in the war effort. These institutions appear in *The Heat of the Day* as names at most. Their anonymity reverberates through characters who are defined by roles in institutions that themselves cannot be described, either by the characters or by the novel's narrator, and whose relationships are mediated by the institutions that form them. What Bowen termed her "*present-day* historical novel" accordingly shuns any sustained concern with politics or the internal workings of these crypto-institutions, exploring instead the impersonal forms of relationship that they enable. The potential to live life at a certain "pitch" (in Bowen's term), figured centrally in the Big House in *Bowen's Court*, is here dispersed across a field of anonymous institutions; in *The Heat of the Day*, as Stella's son Roderick keeps repeating, "everything depends on so much else" (48, 56).

As it establishes the coordinates of character in the novel, Bowen's crypto-institutionalism becomes the condition for the events of its central plot. As the novel opens, Stella is two years into a love affair with Robert Kelway, who, left with an "uncertain knee" after being wounded at Dunkirk, has come to London to work at "the War Office" (97). Much as in the description of Stella herself, their relationship's beginnings are narrated in such a way as to produce the impression of relationality with as little of the content of the relation as possible. The lovers' first meeting, at the height of the Blitz, is "in a bar or club—afterwards they could never remember which" (103).

Their first words to each other are overpowered by the "cataracting roar" of a bomb falling on a nearby building: "It was the demolition of an entire moment. . . . What they *had* both been saying, or been on the point of saying, neither them ever now were to know. . . . What they next said, what they said instead, they forgot: there are questions which if not asked at the start are not asked later; so those they never did ask" (104). It is as though the "demolition" of "the moment" consists in scattering what had been its possible constituent parts across sentences: what they had been saying, what they had been about to say, what they next said, what they said instead, the questions they could have asked—all are evoked but then erased from the text. This erasure, both thematized and enacted by the narrator, enables what would be a momentary impression—"a flash of promise, a background of mystery" (103)—to become the governing atmosphere of Stella and Robert's affair. "It was a characteristic of that life in the moment and for the moment's sake," Bowen writes, "that one knew people well without knowing much about them: vacuum as to future was offset by vacuum as to past; life-stories were shed as so much superfluous weight" (103). If there is the "promise" of new kinds of intimacy in the idea of casting off one's life story as "superfluous weight," there is also the possibility of danger, or "mystery," in the notion that one could "know people well without knowing much about them." The novel's plot traces out this promise and danger.

The promise of impersonal love is the other side of the terror of the Blitz. The novel delineates how the threat to life from German bombs and the demands placed on each individual by incorporation into the British war machine create a "particular conjunction of life and death" (100). It was a "heady," "sweet autumn"; against the "tenseness of evening. . . . you felt more and more called upon to observe the daytime as

a pure and curious holiday from fear" (98). "Never had any season been more felt," Bowen writes; "one bought the poetic sense of it with the sense of death." Descriptive terms accumulate to evoke a mood: "heady," "sweet," "tense," "poetic." This mood runs up against the continual pressure of regulated, institutional work: "In offices, factories, ministries, shops, kitchens the hot yellow sands of each afternoon ran out slowly; fatigue was the one reality" (99). With proximity to the dead increasing with each night's casualties, "The wall between the living and the living became less solid. . . . in that September transparency people became transparent" (102). The sustained tension of wartime life and the circumstances of evacuated London perform what Bowen in "The Big House" calls "the subjugation of the personal," producing as compensation "an easy and unsuspicious intercourse, to which everyone brought the best they had":

> To be at work built her up, and when not at work she was being gay in company whose mood was at the pitch of her own—society became lovable; it had the temperament of the stayers-on in London. The existence, surrounded by one another, of these people she nightly saw was fluid, easy, holding inside itself a sort of ideality of pleasure. . . . This was the new society of one kind of wealth, resilience, living how it liked—people whom the climate of danger suited, who began, even, all to look a little alike, as they might in the sun, snows and altitude of the same sports station, or browning along the same beach in the South of France. The very temper of pleasures lay in their chanciness, in the canvaslike impermanence of their settings, in their being off-time. . . . Faces

> came and went. There was a diffused gallantry in the atmosphere, an unmarriedness: it came to be rumoured about the country, among the self-banished, the uneasy, the put-upon and the safe, that everybody in London was in love—which was true, if not in the sense the country meant. (102-103)

"Built up" by work, Stella finds that people have become "transparent," or have begun "all to look a little alike"; rather than lending heightened definition to individual personalities, wartime makes individuals interchangeable ("Faces came and went"). If the interchangeability of persons is sobering to contemplate in the face of mass death, it nonetheless frees its subjects from personal concern into a "diffused gallantry." The anonymity and impersonality of institutions, individuals, and social intercourse opens a space for ephemerality, for "living how it liked," for a new kind of "love"—in short, for the development of a style of living. While Heather Bryant Jordan argues that in *The Heat of the Day* "a world at war . . . invades and poisons the love affair between the central figures," these passages suggest the opposite—that the impersonal world actually makes possible what occurs between Stella and Robert: "the continuous narrative of love . . . kept gaining substance, shadow, consistency from the imperfectly known and the not-said" (108); that narrative builds on the impersonality at its heart.[38] Moreover, Stella and Robert's story, a product of the crypto-institutional setting of wartime, has a precedent: in *Bowen's Court* the Big House, "like Flaubert's ideal book about nothing . . . sustains itself on itself by the inner force of its style" (*BC*, 21), while the love affair in *The Heat of the Day*, "like the ideal book about nothing, stayed itself on itself by its inner force" (97).

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[38] Jordan, 153.

Yet while the novel's love story could not take the form it does without the mediation of London's anonymous institutions, this same logic of anonymity brings it under threat. The central crisis of *The Heat of the Day* is initiated by Harrison, a vague but unpleasant figure who, through an apparently chance meeting, insinuates himself into Stella's life. As the novel opens, he has impressed upon Stella the necessity of his meeting with her at her flat, where he delivers an accusation and offers her a bargain. Robert Kelway, Harrison says, is a spy passing secrets to the enemy; Harrison is part of the agency charged with patrolling such activity—in fact, he himself is in charge of monitoring Robert, and he has the power to determine whether Robert will be arrested or allowed to remain free: "A lot could happen to him," he says, "at any moment—which would be too bad, eh? As against which, it might not. If you and I could arrange things, things might be arranged" (34-35). Through such empty oppositions and tautologies, it emerges that if Stella breaks with Robert and takes up with Harrison, Harrison in turn will not have Robert arrested. As Stella says, "You propose that by becoming your mistress I buy out a man, in whom I have an interest, who is by your showing dangerous to the country" (41). Harrison is less definite: he wants "You to give me a break. Me to come here, be here, in and out of here, on and off—at the same time, always. To be in your life, as they call it—your life, just as it is" (31). "Is it so odd I should want a place of my own?" he asks (34).

Harrison's blackmail opens the timeframe in which the bulk of *The Heat of the Day* takes place, on "the first Sunday of September 1942" (4). The novel's chronology can be baffling—it looks back at various points, with only fleeting indicators of the shifts, to the autumn of 1940 and May of 1942, before concluding in February of 1944 during

the "Little Blitz"—and the disorientation this creates serves as ample illustration of how the time of war could become a "tideless, hypnotic, futureless day-to-day." Thus it is jarring to realize the precision with which Bowen pins the story's central events to a specific period of just over two months, concluding with "the Allied landings in North Africa" (on November 8, 1942) and "the Sunday set for victorious bell-ringing" (presumably November 15) (327). For Stella, the novel's present is a period of Hamlet-like indecision, brought on by Harrison's unproven but confidently asserted mastery of the situation. If she tells Robert that he is suspected, Harrison says, those watching him will know that he has been informed and he will be brought in: "I've never yet known a man not change his behavior once he's known he's watched; it's exactly changes like that that are being watched for" (37). On the other hand, if Stella, who is "not a woman who does not know where to go" (41), should turn Harrison in, she can bring him down but she will have brought Robert down with him, as it will be assumed by "a number of people" (42) that Robert has been told as well. If all these conditions are true, she is trapped; if they are not, as she repeatedly tells herself, she should turn Harrison in. But Stella hedges.

In the course of this standoff, the irony of Harrison's desire for "a place of my own" becomes clear; Harrison is everywhere. The catch-22 he presents to Stella relies on a level of surveillance that no individual could possibly be capable of, and yet he comes to appear to be the singular, uncannily acute agent of that surveillance. When Stella travels to Robert's family home, a dreadful Edwardian villa in the Home Counties that the Kelways call Holme Dene, Harrison immediately knows where she has been, appearing on her doorstep as she returns from, as he puts it, going "to look at the first

place where the rot could start" (144). In rationed London, he always has an excess of matches and flashlight batteries, suggesting that he occupies the high-level role that he implies he does (140-141). And he repeatedly offers unimpeachable accounts of how he has proceeded in framing his plot that nonetheless give nothing in particular away. All these factors combine to justify Stella's hesitation, but Harrison's identity—at least his identity insofar as he is the counterspy he claims to be—is confirmed when he reveals to Stella that he knows the exact moment in which she finally *has* told Robert: "That night you got back from Ireland" (260). Indeed, having returned from a trip to Ireland, Stella confronts Robert with Harrison's accusation, only to have it denied (210-212). Told now that, as predicted, his behavior has changed, Stella realizes that Harrison has been telling the truth; she implicitly offers Harrison what he initially demanded as ransom, but he refuses. Late the same night, Stella again confronts Robert, who admits that he is a German spy. Convinced that her apartment is watched and that his time is running short, he insists on making an escape across the rooftops, despite his bad knee; as Stella closes the door behind him and returns to her apartment, "In the street below, not so much a step as the semi-stumble of someone after long standing shifting his position could be, for the first time by her, heard" (326). These are the last words of the chapter, and they indicate that Robert has in fact been tailed; but, in a resolution delayed across the chapter break, he dies in a "fall or leap from the roof" (327).

Each turn of the plot around Robert, Stella, and Harrison thus hinges on the novel's crypto-institutional logic. Compelled by their work at Y.X.D. and the War Office to be silent about so much, Stella and Robert can have only an imperfect knowledge of each other (as Harrison says, "He's, as you know, at the War Office—that's probably all

you do know" [35]), much as that same silence, adopted by the narrator, allows the reader only an imperfect knowledge of them; this is what lends their relationship its "promise" and "mystery." But just as impersonality enables new forms of love, it enables new forms of treachery. As Stella says to Harrison, "If it only were that you loved me, I could do no worse than not love you back; but there has been something worse—somehow you've distorted love" (156). Stella and Robert's love relies on unspoken assumptions based on the merely formal knowledge that they have of each other's character—assumptions about trustworthiness that, in time of war, they seem never to have to interrogate, and which issue from the institutions they each occupy. Harrison "distorts" this situation by both inhabiting it himself and turning its logic against Stella by invoking the institution of which he is a part: "You've bludgeoned me with your perpetual 'we'—your 'we' is my 'they,'" she says, exasperated (41). Harrison's effect on the plot is predicated on his being part of that "we," the intelligence agency; Stella's hesitation on the impossibility of knowing for sure whether or not he is. His seeming omnipresence and omniscience are the conditions for his threats being credible, and despite these qualities' unlikeliness they turn out to be real—as far as the plot is concerned, Harrison appears to be everywhere and know everything. Stella thinks that "he was as a character 'impossible'—each time they met, for instance, he showed no shred or trace of having been continuous since they last met. . . . the uninterestingly right state of what he wore seemed less to argue physical care—brushing, pressing, changes of linen—than a physical going into abeyance, just as he was, with everything he had on him, between appearances" (155). Harrison is, as *Bowen's Court* suggests it is possible to be, not only the intelligence agency's product but also its agent. Like Conrad's Chief Engineer, he is entirely contiguous with the outlines

of his "inhuman" institutional home, the intelligence agency, and Stella experiences his attentions as those of an institution rather than of an individual: "His concentration on her was made more oppressive by his failure to have or let her give him any possible place in the human scene" (155). As Ellman puts it, "He is 'a character "impossible"' because he represents a switchboard rather than a personality, a link to a vast invisible bureaucracy" (168). Ellman suggests that Robert is also impossible in this sense, "a spy-ring rather than a single spy" (168), but even this does not go far enough. Stella too is "impossible"; all these characters and their connections depend on links to some "vast invisible bureaucracy"—invisible to them and to us, even as its presence is the condition for the narrative itself.

Thus, when we have seen how crypto-institutionalism "thin[s] the wall between the living and the living," it comes as no surprise to see this dynamic "distorted" too. While part of the "pleasure" of wartime London is that "people . . . began, even, all to look a little alike," Stella is disturbed to realize that, as she hedges and delays, she has begun to turn into Harrison. "You succeed in making a spy of me," she tells him (152). The second time Harrison appears at Stella's apartment, they find themselves standing next to each other looking out over the city: "two persons speechlessly at a window became as anonymous as the city they overlooked. These two, though fated to speak again, could be felt to be depersonalized speakers in a drama" (154). As Stella hesitates to bring her situation with Robert to a crisis, she and Harrison develop their own strange intimacy. He fetches her a glass of milk (145); she asks him to post a package that she has brought for a relative of Robert's (147). Presuppositions about who one might trust (a lover) or not trust (a blackmailer) undergo a slow reversal. Desire for the impersonal

lover depends on imperfect knowledge, while the blackmailer holds out the possibility of certitude with regard to at least one question: whether or not he can follow through on his threat. Their inversion is condensed and completed when Robert confirms that he has been a spy throughout his affair with Stella: "It seemed to her it was Robert who had been the Harrison" (310). And predictably enough, at the end of the novel, it is also Harrison who has been the Robert: "I don't know your other, your christian name," Stella says. "What's wrong with it—what is it?" "Robert," he replies (362). Their last words in this exchange, conducted during the "Little Blitz" of February 1944, hold open the possibility that, after all, the terms Harrison originally requested will be fulfilled: Stella, though now engaged to a distant cousin, asks him to stay; he seems to refuse, but the scene closes with "Harrison looking at his watch. 'Or would you rather I stayed till the All Clear?" (363).

Stella's becoming a spy and the exchange of places between Harrison and Robert Kelway are only two instances of the games *The Heat of the Day* plays with names and doubling: the novel features two Victors, two Roberts, a Stella and a Nellie, and the self-repeating names Roderick Rodney and Louie Lewis. At one point, Harrison is called "Robertson" (354), while Roderick is told he looks "more like yourself" wearing Robert's bathrobe (49) and is referred to as "Robert" (89). Neil Corcoran refers to this replication of characters and traits as Bowen's "*doppelganger* effect" (180) and points out the "Irish watermark" on the novel's doublings, which recall the interchangeable names of Bowen patriarchs in *Bowen's Court* and the fact that, had Bowen herself been born a boy, she would have been named Robert.[39] Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle

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[39] As Bowen writes in *Seven Winters*, a short memoir of her Dublin childhood, "The first male Bowen in

argue that through its doublings and mergers the novel mounts an "explicitly historical" "affirmation of the undecidability of identity" as a condition of the emergence of the political.[40] There certainly is an *Anglo*-Irish "watermark" on *The Heat of the Day*, but as I have sought to emphasize, the novel's Anglo-Irishness inheres less in its thematic or biographical echoes of that history than in its characterological investment in impersonality, which Bowen locates in Anglo-Ireland in *Bowen's Court* but redeploys here, pushing it to ends that look very different from those of the social idea developed in the Big House. If Anglo-Ireland's failure to keep up the social idea led to the descent into mere "personal life"—the production of selves overstuffed with nothing of significance—in wartime the threat runs in the opposite direction, to the destruction of selves, and not necessarily by bombing. In one of the novel's few explicit references to a particular institution, Stella "fear[s] that the Army was out to obliterate Roderick. In the course of a process, a being processed, she could do nothing to stop, her son might possibly disappear " (50). Likewise, while the institutional impersonality of *The Heat of the Day* is certainly historical, as Bennett and Royle argue, it is the product of two quite specific histories—of Anglo-Ireland and wartime London—colliding in the text, and it is difficult to find anything there that would amount to a straightforward affirmation of its crypto-

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each generation had been christened either Robert or Henry. My grandfather had been Robert, my father Henry—there was no doubt which name was waiting for me." Bowen, *Seven Winters* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1942), 21.

[40] Bennet and Royle, *Elizabeth Bowen and the Dissolution of the Novel* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 93. Robert Caserio makes the related (and more compelling) argument that *The Heat of the Day* is a riposte to widespread notions of narrative, indebted to Paul de Man, as "by its very nature a structure of lurid opposites"—most notably, for Caserio, that of "tychism and totality," chance and necessity, choice and no-choice. Bowen's novel, by contrast, shows us a world in which "the careers of love are agonizing because they belong to history and to fiction and therefore to narrative as Bowen practices it. They belong to a narrative network of distinctions and disjunctions that is simultaneously a network of likenesses and continuities; they belong to a sequence of choices and decisions that undoes choice and decision." Caserio, *The Novel in England 1900-1950: History and Theory* (New York: Twayne, 1999), 268, 269.

institutionalism, which, as I have argued, ultimately produces both the promise of style and impersonality and the danger or "distortion" attendant on the unavoidability of wartime secrecy.

Furthermore, the seemingly necessary double-sidedness of Bowen's crypto-institutionalism means that it incorporates none of the political valences of, for example, Mulk Raj Anand's institutional form, which finds the promise of amelioration and accountability in the way that institutions might theoretically render many details of individual identity irrelevant. Indeed, it is precisely the institutional position Harrison occupies that renders him unaccountable (to any other character in the novel, at least), and the one directly narrated scene of institutional accountability, Stella's deposition in the coroner's court after Robert's death, has no bearing on the novel's plot. The deposition is presented as a monologue: "I cannot say, I'm afraid; I did not notice. . . . No, I do not remember drinking more heavily than usual. . . . As far as I know, absolutely clear: I remember everything" (341). Stella never has to deny knowledge of Robert's spying, as it is in no one's interest to mention it, and the narration reinforces institutional anonymity by placing ellipses where the voice of the institution's representative would be. Stella herself never learns the truth, as "the silence from behind the scenes never broke" (340), and she leaves the court "with one kind of reputation, that of being a good witness" (344), only to have a different reputation circulated in the press, that of being "the woman friend in the luxury flat" (340). There are hints here of a greater danger than that of having one's identity destroyed; worse, perhaps, is to have it stolen and disseminated in an unrecognizable form through unaccountable institutions.

If, by this point, the impersonal social idea of Anglo-Irish institutional life seems, like Stella, to have "come loose" from its "moorings" (125), those moorings remain in the novel in residual form through Mount Morris, a Big House that Roderick has inherited. Its owner, Stella's Cousin Francis Morris, is dead when the novel begins; his wife Nettie has for many years lived in a small, quiet mental hospital. Cousin Francis's funeral is where Stella and Harrison first meet—Harrison knows Cousin Francis, a political dilettante, through unnamed machinations related to Irish neutrality. Stella spent her honeymoon at Mount Morris, and it has been left to Roderick, though he never met Cousin Francis, "in the hope that he may care in his own way to carry on the old tradition" (95). The house is important for Roderick, who, long pegged as "one of the dreamy ones who get by somehow" (53), is given purpose and definition by his inheritance: without having seen the house, it becomes for him "a habitat" (97). Bowen writes that "the house came out to meet his growing capacity for attachment. . . . [it] became the hub of his imaginary life" (52). Initially an unpromising soldier, under the influence of this imagined Mount Morris he, "having bestirred himself, obtained his commission in the autumn of 1943" (339). And his first visit to the house, walking the grounds at night, leaves him "deeply stirred" (350):

> The place had concentrated upon Roderick its being: this was the hour of the never-before—gone were virgin dreams with anything they had had of himself in them, anything they had had of the picturesque, sweet, easy, strident. He was left possessed, oppressed, and in awe. He heard the pulse in his temple beating into the pillow; he was followed by the sound of his own footsteps

> over his own land. The consummation woke in him, for the first time, the concept and fearful idea of death, his. (352)

As the house "concentrated upon Roderick its being," it recalls Bowen's Court, which, "with a rather alarming sureness . . . has made all the succeeding Bowens." The exaltation of inheritance leads him to the "idea of death, his," and with it an awareness that he might live for something that transcends his individual existence. In this way Mount Morris a refuge from the depredations of wartime and "personal life." This effect is heightened by Mount Morris' juxtaposition with the Kelway family house, Holme Dene, a house up for sale since it was built, surrounded by garden gnomes, lawn furniture, and "vegetables of the politer kind" (115). Robert's mother, "Muttikins," his sister Ernestine, and her children speak to each other in baby-talk and fawn over pets: "I often think," Ernestine piously intones, "that if Hitler could have looked into that dog's eyes, the story might have been very different" (137). Here, architecture and character *are* directly implicated in one another, and the shallowness of the house's sham Tudor design both expresses and shapes the falsity of its inhabitants. *The Heat of the Day* links Robert's Quislingism directly to his search for a way out of the house's "swastika-arms of passage leading to nothing" (289) and the "class without a middle" (307) into which he was born.[41]

Against Holme Dene's fraudulence, the apparent authenticity of Roderick's possession of and by Mount Morris and the organic resonance of "his own footsteps over

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[41] See Ashley Maher, "'Swastika Arms of Passage Leading to Nothing': Late Modernism and the 'New' Britain," *ELH* 80 (2013): 251-285. Maher argues convincingly that late modernists like Bowen, George Orwell, and Christopher Isherwood "examined interior and architectural design as a means of expressing their apprehension about their own style and its political implications in years when form had become newly politicized" (251).

his own land" can seem like a reanimation of Bowen's Anglo-Irish social idea in the location from whence it originally came. Many readers of the novel have found this problematic. Vera Kreilkamp suggests that while Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) offers a subversive view of the Big House that acknowledges the violence of its colonial history, the later novel steps back from this critical stance into a complacent conservatism. As Kreilkamp argues, "In *The Heat of the Day*, where Bowen's revulsion against contemporary society engenders a powerful nostalgia, her hierarchy of values often slides into a familiar Yeatsian worship of social lineage and inherited property" (162). This seems a fair assessment if we take the figure of the Big House as the only embodiment of the Anglo-Irish ideal in Bowen's fiction, and if we see her as participating alongside Yeats in a cultural revitalization of that ideal.

As I have argued, though, Anglo-Ireland's social idea migrates in *The Heat of the Day* to the crypto-institutional field of wartime London, a move enabled in part by Bowen's refusal of Yeats's cultural nationalism in favor of an impersonal account of Anglo-Irish institutional life. Accordingly, Bowen's portrayal of Mount Morris is more equivocal than Kreilkamp's reading credits. The house is empty, except for the caretaker Donovan and his two daughters; nothing "social" happens there anymore. Roderick, though actualized by his inheritance, finds that its terms resist interpretation: "Does he mean, that I'm free to care in any way I like, so long as it's *the* tradition I carry on; or, that so long as I care in the same way he did, I'm free to mean by 'tradition' anything I like?" (95). And Stella, visiting the house to begin settling its affairs in Roderick's absence, holds up a lamp to see her face in the drawing-room mirror and "became for a moment immortal as a portrait. Momentarily she was the lady of the house" (193). From

this imaginative vantage she briefly feels the suffering that accompanied the decline of the Anglo-Irish ideal, especially for women: "After all, was it not chiefly here in this room and under this illusion that Cousin Nettie Morris—and who now knew how many more before her?—had been pressed back, hour by hour, by the hours themselves, into cloudland? Ladies had gone not quite mad, not quite even that, from in vain listening for meaning in the loudening ticking of the clock" (193). Stella herself "turned away from" the house's "judgement," unable to imagine herself trapped as Mount Morris' previous female inhabitants were. Putting the lamp down, the reflection vanishes, and she thinks, "that was that" (194), acknowledging with a gesture that that form of life, which in its decline had become so constrictive, is gone. What remains is a thread of potential: "There was still to be seen what came of Counsin Francis's egotistic creative boldness with regard to the future, of his requisitioning for that purpose of Roderick" (194). Far from enacting conservative nostalgia, these passages acknowledge that the social idea that once fuelled life at Mount Morris, for better and for worse, has departed; like character itself in *The Heat of the Day*, the Big House is evoked only to be emptied out. The last gasp of Anglo-Irish "egotistic creative boldness," with its echoes of Henry Bowen, the Builder, is enough to hand the house on; but the ambiguity of Cousin Francis's will, which so puzzles Roderick, speaks to the empty future to which that passing-on opens. The novel gives no hint of whether Roderick will survive the Allied invasion of Europe that marks the end of the narrative, or what will become of the house if he does. But the stylish and impersonal form of life that happened there one hundred and fifty years before has fled elsewhere.

The Heat of the Day serves as a summation of Bowen's wartime writing. While it adapts the form of institutional character developed in *Bowen's Court*, many of its key formal and thematic features can also be found scattered throughout the body of short stories that Bowen published during the war. "Careless Talk," only four pages long, depicts almost entirely through dialogue a lunch meeting between Joanna, exiled to the countryside, and her friends Mary Dash, Edward, and Ponsonby. Having presented Mary with three delicate eggs, unobtainable in the city, Joanna is bewildered by the rush of conversation among the other three and finds herself with nothing to contribute to the high-octane exchange of names and insider references in which they engage. "These days everything's frightfully interesting," Mary says. "Joanna, you must be feeling completely dazed."[42] The narrator of "Green Holly," a ghost story set in a country house converted for wartime use, enacts a literalized version of crypto-institutionalism: the three main characters "were Experts—in what, the censor would not permit me to say."[43] Perhaps most interestingly, "The Happy Autumn Fields" links the London of the Blitz to Victorian Anglo-Ireland. The narrative opens in a Big House in Ireland, where Sarah and her sister Henrietta await the arrival of Sarah's suitor Eugene, whose presence threatens the bond between the two sisters. Suddenly the scene shifts to a bombed-out house in wartime London, where a sleeper named Mary wakes up, distraught to find that she is herself and not the Sarah she was in the dream. Before she fell asleep, she had found a box of letters and family heirlooms that seem to have prompted her dream. Her fiancé Travis encourages her to get up and leave the house, but she goes back to sleep,

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[42] Bowen, "Careless Talk," *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen*, intro. Angus Wilson (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), 670.
[43] Bowen, "Green Holly," *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen*, 719.

becoming Sarah again. Henrietta accuses Eugene, who has not declared his love for Sarah, of "making something terrible happen" (683) and the inhabitants of the drawing room turn to Sarah, when another bomb strikes near the house in London and Mary awakes for good, in tears. "How are we to live without natures?" she asks Travis. "So much flowed through people; so little flows through us. All we can do is imitate love or sorrow" (684). But Mary's sense that she is descended from Sarah is wrong; Travis has read the letters while she slept, he says, and discovered that Sarah and Henrietta remained unmarried, while Eugene died young in a fall from his horse. The letter's author, Travis says, "wonders, and will always wonder, what made the horse shy in those empty fields" (685). Ellman argues that this story, showing as it does that tragedy could strike without reason in the seemingly golden past as much as in the wartime present, functions as a commentary on the insufficiency of the Anglo-Irish ethos. As she argues, "Mary projects on to the past her fantasies of plenitude and equipoise," but "the horse that throws its rider in the empty field proves that terror can rise up without a bomb. . . . the literature of [wartime] can no longer rely on the old certainties of time or place" (172). Thus "The Happy Autumn Fields" would echo the emptying-out of the Big House that I have argued is enacted in *The Heat of the Day*. But Ellman does not note another, minor presence in the wartime scene of the story. Asked by Mary who is playing a piano in an exploded house down the street, Travis replies, "Oh, one of the furniture movers in Number Six. I didn't count the jaquerie; of course *they're* in possession—unsupervised, teeming, having a high old time. . . .You know there's a workman downstairs lying on your blue sofa looking for pictures in one of your French books?" (677). The workmen are pointed out, but they play no role in the drama unfolding in Mary's dream or between Mary and

Travis. Present but unaffected by the ostensible main thread of the narrative, they "don't count." But keeping in mind the story's near-allegorization of the concerns of *The Heat of the Day*, the "jaquerie" might be seen to reflect the situation of the novel's final subplot, that of Louie Lewis and her friend Connie.

Louie speaks the first dialogue in the novel, trying to attach herself to Harrison as he sits thinking in Regent's Park, and the novel closes two years later on her, holding up her newborn son to watch as three swan pass overhead, "disappearing in the direction of the West" (372). Her husband Tom is in India; her parents have been killed by a bomb in the Battle of Britain. In the course of the novel Louie goes to work in a factory, briefly befriends Stella in a restaurant on the night that she learns of Robert's betrayal, gets pregnant in an anonymous pick-up, and learns of Tom's death; her child will be named Thomas Victor, combining the names, coincidentally, of her and Stella's dead husbands. Louie is, as Hermione Lee puts it, "lonely, naively promiscuous, weepy and silly" (183), though as Lee argues she embodies the part of England "left out of count by Robert's ideology—the unconscious natural will to survive and produce life" (184). More than this, though, Louie and Connie don't "count" just as the workmen of "The Happy Autumn Fields" don't count: they are in but not of the novel's institutional world, essentially comic, and all too personal—institutional types of a sort that will by now be familiar. Connie, Louie's friend and neighbor, is an A.R.P. warden eternally dressed in "dark-blue official slacks," with a "postbox mouth" (163) taken straight from Charles Dickens's Wemmick (a prototype for the institutional characters that populate all the works I have discussed). Louie is described as being physically constituted by the newspapers:

> But it was from the articles in the papers that the real build-up, the alimentation came. Louie, after a week or two on the diet, discovered that she *had* got a point of view, and not only *a* point of view but the right one. . . . Was she not a worker, a soldier's lonely wife, a war orphan, a pedestrian, a Londoner, a home and animal-lover, a thinking democrat, a movie-goer, a woman of Britain, a letter-writer, a fuel-saver and a housewife? . . . Louie now felt bad only about any part of herself which in any way did not fit into the papers' picture: she could not have survived their disapproval. (168-169)

Louie comes to recognize herself through the "alimentation" of her newspaper "diet"; without it "she could not have survived." Her dependency on a less figurative form of institutional sustenance is reinforced at the novel's end, when, taken in hand by the wartime state, she gives birth to her son and "departed from the very door of the hospital into abeyance in a Midland county" (371). Crypto-institutional form, which linked *The Heat of the Day* to Bowen's Anglo-Irish ideal, does not operate here; the effects of Civil Defence, the health service, and the media on individual character are rendered with stark clarity. Absent too is the sheen of style and gallantry that settles on the characters of the novel's central plotline. Louie and Connie thus point beyond the novel to the postwar period, registering Bowen's skepticism—which is by no means uncomplicated—about the legacy of wartime in the welfare state.

Not long after the war ended, Bowen wrote to her friend William Plomer:

> I have adored England since 1940 because of the stylishness Mr. Churchill gave it, but I've always felt, "When Mr. Churchill goes, I go." I can't stick all these middle-class Labour wets with their Old London School of Economics ties and their women. Scratch any of those cuties and you find the governess.[44]

Given the disdain for state planning that drips from these lines, it may seem puzzling that Bowen's wartime novel is so invested in a crypto-institutional style whose ultimate referent, though occluded, is the state—especially given the historical continuity between the wartime expansion of government and its increased reach in the era of the welfare state. Why was the state in the first context electrifying—what was "stylish" about Churchill?—and in the second deadening? Bowen's apparent affirmation, across her literary writing, of both the big house *and* the intelligence service as homes for a social idea, and her fixation on Churchill's "style," suggest an evaluation of all the institutions in her writing less in terms of their ability to foster collective change or justice (or even to preserve tradition), and more for the opportunities they afford individuals to develop impersonal, stylish, exciting, and gallant ways of living. The basic conservatism of this sensibility does not object to state power as such. What elicits in Bowen's writing what Glendinning terms "the authentic rhetoric of reaction," and what she found impossible to assimilate to an institutional imagination formed by the Anglo-Irish social idea, is when institutions simply provide concrete goods rather than opportunities for individuals to live at a heightened "pitch." Thus she could find the postwar welfare state stultifying while writing enthusiastically, while on a journalistic assignment in postwar Germany, of the

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[44] Bowen to William Plomer, quoted in Glendinning, 160.

single-mindedness of students fostered by the state-run universities, whose administrative structure and social role she delves into in great detail in a 1954 essay titled "Without Coffee, Cigarettes, or Feeling":

> Young Germany, and most of all its students, has what maybe the young of the democracies lack just now—a vast, commanding, and to them noble incentive. Everything that they do counts; everything they give themselves to matters. True, one is only young once, and some of what should be youth's pleasures are passing by them. But is it not one's ideals which make life worthwhile and, by doing so, keep one happy? *Their* ideal is single—it is recovery.[45]

Elsewhere, she writes that "in spite of these deprivations, 'life' as one understands it does spring up. . . . in each place, the students *could* be felt to be a community, within which existed sympathies and attractions, shared points of view and exchanged secrets" (94). Visiting the state-run university, Bowen rediscovers in the hard-pressed German students both the suppression of personality and the richness of collective life that she also locates in Anglo-Ireland and wartime London. (Perhaps not coincidentally, the shifting sites of institutional impersonality in her work track the movement of Bowen's own life. After selling Bowen's Court she would spend considerable time as a visiting professor of writing at universities.) Bowen's concept of the institution, then, evades politics—despite Bowen's own engagement in the political life of her time—by addressing institutions in essentially aesthetic terms. In bringing to bear on the institutions of the state a concept generated from domestic society, Bowen captures the interplay and erases the distinction,

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[45] Bowen, "Without Coffee, Cigarettes, or Feeling," in *People, Places, Things,* ed. Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2008), 99.

central to recent tendencies in literary studies, between state and non-state collective actors. The formation that produced these insights and aesthetic innovations, though, also produces a blindness to the types of institutional life promoted by an activist state in peacetime—indeed, Bowen seems not to have thought of the welfare state as an institution at all, in the sense in which she thought of Anglo-Ireland or the agencies of collective preservation during the Blitz as institutions that generate character and ways of living. That blindness might warn us to beware of our own presuppositions as we seek to formulate theories of institutional life adequate to its complex embodiments and relations—to find ways not only of bringing to light the collective commitments of institutions but also, perhaps, of affirming them.

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